

Physis in the Poetics of Charles Olson

by

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For my Mother and Father

In addition, I should like to thank those people who helped me toward the completion of this thesis: most especially, James Hewitt-White, who patiently tutored me in the theoretical physics; my advisor, Colin Nicholson, for his guidance and unfailing encouragement; Danny Kushner who first put The Bow in my hands; Robert Hogg and David Andrews for the benefit of their insights into the poems; and my sister Jane, who taught me to see again as "all start up/to the eye and soul".

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Summary

Charles Olson proposes a new humanism which reassesses man's place in the universe, given the discoveries of contemporary science. This study examines the major of these scientific breakthroughs in order to demonstrate their ramifications in Olson's thought. It begins with a brief delineation of Einstein's "General Theory of Relativity," illustrating how this scientific revelation, together with Alfred North Whitehead's "philosophy of organism," largely influenced Olson's attitudes to space and matter. The emphasis on energy in the "Projective Verse" essay, for example, is shown to be a mirroring of a topic pre-eminent in modern science. The quantum theory of energy is also touched upon, Olson's various references to quantum "leaps" being explained in context. One of Olson's most difficult essays, "Equal, That Is, to the Real Itself," hinges upon a familiarity with at least the rudiments of non-Euclidean geometry, and the thesis attempts a very basic description of these principles. Einstein's "Special Theory of Relativity" is then explained in essence, its bearing on Olson's theory of instantaneous perception, and on his unique interpretation of history and truth, being examined in detail.

But since Olson's major preoccupation is with man's relation to the natural world, human modes of perception and thought are also of primary concern. For this reason, the thesis makes physis its central theme, the Greek noun comprehending by definition both the natural world and a man's disposition, or natural parts. Having established the changes wrought by science on Olson's notion of space, matter, energy, and time, the thesis turns to the human organism itself as conceived by the poet. The third chapter thus examines his theory of the body as

instrument, concentrating on his idea of the "middle voice," and in the light of the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, unfolding the physiological message contained in the essay "Proprioception."

The thesis goes on to elucidate the aesthetic theory for which Olson is perhaps best known, the "composition by field" method of "projective verse." This poetic formula depends, in fact, on the disposition toward nature to which Olson urged mankind. The poet acts as instrument to energies greater than himself. Thus the "field" of the poem is discussed in the study, both in terms of its scientific inspiration, the electromagnetic field of physics, and of its philosophical basis, stemming from the fact of man's emplacement in creation. Several poems of each of the three major practitioners of "projective verse," Olson, Robert Creeley, and Robert Duncan, are analysed according to the principles set down in "Projective Verse."

The second half of the thesis devotes itself to man's mythic recreation of the natural world, a process which Olson saw as both essential to the preservation of the universe, and a natural product of man's parts. The scientific discovery having perhaps the furthest epistemological impact is Werner Heisenberg's "Principle of Uncertainty" and in the fifth chapter, the ramifications of such an insurmountable limit on man's knowledge are thoroughly investigated. One of these is the democratization of the poetic condition, Olson conceiving this as a most essential base in a universe now defined as relatively perceived and ultimately unknowable. But Olson's mythic theory has as well ethical connotations, and these too are enumerated.

Olson dedicated the second and third volumes of his long serial poem Maximus, to making a mythic world-picture on Dogtown Common, the

area of Gloucester, Massachusetts which he believed to be the home-ground of his creativity. Two chapters of the thesis attempt to trace the development of Olson's poetic-mythic process from raw perceptual material to the ultimate exfoliation in an integrated world and self. Olson's concept of myth is inextricable from the studies of C.G. Jung and his debt to the Jungian theory of individuation is also thoroughly documented.

The study concludes with a consideration of the third volume of Maximus, published posthumously in 1975. In this book Olson, in effect, curves back upon himself, scrutinizing his own philosophy, and various mythic creations. It thus serves as the best vantage point from which to perceive Olson's work as a whole, and a comprehensive image expressive of the nucleus of his work, both in poetry and prose, is attempted.

Note

The following abbreviations are used in the thesis:

<u>AM</u>	=	<u>Archaeologist of Morning</u>
<u>AP</u>	=	<u>Additional Prose</u>
<u>CM</u>	=	<u>Causal Mythology</u>
<u>HU</u>	=	<u>Human Universe and Other Essays</u>
<u>LO</u>	=	<u>Letters for Origin</u>
<u>MI</u>	=	<u>The Maximus Poems</u>
<u>MII</u>	=	<u>Maximus Poems IV, V, VI</u>
<u>MIII</u>	=	<u>The Maximus Poems - Volume Three</u>
<u>ML</u>	=	<u>Mayan Letters</u>
<u>PT</u>	=	<u>Poetry and Truth</u>
<u>PO</u>	=	<u>The Post Office</u>
<u>SV</u>	=	<u>The Special View of History</u>

Introduction

Six years after his death, Charles Olson continues to be one of the most controversial and influential of America's contemporary poets. His prose work is as extensive as his poetry; a major volume of unpublished essays is yet to be released, and the scope of his interests exceeds even that of Pound. The history of Gloucester, Massachusetts, and of the American West, the Sumerian origin of civilization, the furthest etymological soundings of the English language, the ramifications of twentieth-century physics on epistemology and quotidian life, and the mythologies of many peoples, are but a few of the major concerns. He is still perhaps best known as originator of the "projective verse" theory, and mentor of a group of poets sometimes referred to as the "Black Mountain" school. But Olson's thought most definitely transcends the purely aesthetic; his vision for America is, in fact, Blakean in its fervour. He did not indulge in the largely negative social criticism favoured by poets like Allen Ginsberg, but devoted himself to propagating explicit methodologies, demonstrating how, in practical terms, a man might achieve earthly paradise. The intensity of the vision was no doubt spurred on by the environmental pollution which by the 1950's had become an obvious threat to North American survival. Ecology was not then a catch-word, and one of Olson's first published essays, "Human Universe" (1950), made clear that a primary human duty is "the management of external nature so that none of its virtu be lost..."¹ This care for nature and the organisms which inhabit it, constitutes the basis of all Olson's writings.

He was born in Worcester, Massachusetts in 1910, early enough in

1. Olson, Human Universe, ed. Donald Allen (New York: Grove Press, 1970), p.8.

the century to be ranged with Williams and Pound, at least in terms of era. His parents moved to the sea-port of Gloucester early in his child-hood, and it was there he grew up. The Maximus poems make Gloucester the focal point of his mythic reconstruction of the world, and for his adherents, the city has assumed an inspirational energy surpassing William Carlos Williams' Paterson. Olson did course work in American studies at Harvard, but never completed his doctoral dissertation. His first published book, Call Me Ishmael (1947), is based on research on Melville accomplished at that time. As well as drawing attention to Melville's treatment of physical space, Olson revealed the novelist's debt to Shakespeare, and in particular King Lear. In the 1940's Olson held a variety of minor governmental positions in the Roosevelt government, and this period was to mark the end of his engagement in politics proper. In 1950 he published the "Projective Verse" essay in Poetry New York, and that same year began a correspondence with the American poet Cid Corman, who was planning a new American magazine, to be entitled Origin. The first issue of Origin (1951), was largely devoted to Olson's poetry and prose, and until the formation of the Black Mountain Review in 1954, Origin served as platform for his ideas. In 1951, partially self-financed, Olson undertook a personal expedition to Yucatan where he studied Mayan hieroglyphs, his own refinement on Pound's ideogrammic theory.

The appellation "Black Mountain" originates with the college of the same name in North Carolina, where Olson acted both as instructor and rector from 1951 until 1956. He invited Robert Creeley to teach there in 1954, and Robert Duncan in 1956, the college's final year. Both Creeley and Duncan published works in the college's review, and both

admit being greatly influenced by Olson's theories of "projective verse" and "composition by field." Like all of his methodologies, Olson made their viability hinge on the idiosyncrasy of application. He valued the particularity of human character as he did that of any single object, and what is most remarkable about the practitioners of "projective verse," are their distinct variations on an identical theory. With his presence at the Vancouver Poetry Conference in 1963, Olson similarly influenced a group of Canadian poets who continue to be classified with the "Black Mountain" movement, amongst them, George Bowering, Frank Davey, and Robert Hogg.

But it may well emerge that Olson's lasting influence goes beyond the strict realm of poetic methodology. Beginning with the lectures given at Black Mountain and entitled The Special View of History, he sought to make his students cognizant of the major conceptual advances in twentieth-century science. This was not merely to increase their theoretical knowledge; knowledge was for Olson inextricable from its practical import. Einstein's "Special" and "General Theories of Relativity," and the discoveries of physicists like Max Planck and Werner Heisenberg, all informed Olson's burgeoning philosophy. He saw contemporary physics as totally redefining the world as man has habitually conceived of it, and the new picture radically displaced the human organism from the centre of the universe. In the light of these discoveries, attitudes to time, spatial distance, and to organic and inorganic matter, demand re-examination, and it is a demand which Olson puts to each of his readers. In most cases, he merely alludes to the scientific theories in question, expanding rather on their philosophical, practical, and ethical implications. This thesis undertakes the explication of the most important of these discoveries in

physics which Olson incorporated into his world-view. It in no way purports to be a complete record of Olson's reading in science. His references to physics do cause difficulties for the reader who has been trained primarily in the arts; by leaving obscure the scientific theory, Olson prevails upon the responsive reader to find out for himself, a methodology which also encompasses his vision of history as it is presented in the initial volume of the Maximus poems, first published in 1960.

With his love for man and the natural environment which sustains him, it is physis, rather than physics alone, which repays investigation. Olson took into account quite literally all aspects of the world we inhabit: the outward appearance of natural things, the process of energies in which that matter consists, the laws which determine the placement of the spheres, and man's relation to the whole. Indeed, the Greek idea of physis includes the mind of man:

- φύσις ... the nature, inborn quality, property, or constitution of a person or thing
2. of the mind, one's nature, natural parts, parts, temper, disposition, etc.
 3. the outward form, stature, look...
 4. natural order, nature... (Liddell and Scott, Greek-English Lexicon, p.772)

All these permutations of physis are treated, with varying emphases, in Olson's poetry and prose. He owes much to Williams and Pound in terms of exactitude and clarity of concrete image, and the keenest visual perception is evidenced in all three volumes of the Maximus poems; these make up a series which Olson began in 1949 and continued until his illness in late 1969. The first volume of Maximus (1960) establishes a physical and historical description of Gloucester, Olson centring on man's interaction with physis in times past and present. The original settlement of the city and the three hundred year old fishing industry

afforded examples both negative and positive, and the human handling of American resource is seen in microcosm. Although not so titled, the first volume of Maximus consists of three books, but these are not distinguished in the text. The second volume was thus entitled The Maximus Poems IV, V, VI;² it was first published in 1968, and is remarkable for its unifying mythic quality. Olson was greatly interested in Jung's theory of archetype and the collective unconscious, and thus Maximus IV, V, VI draws in the mind of man, his natural parts, and disposition. In fact, Olson believed that mythic creativity was a capability in-built to the human organism, a point of view densely and somewhat obscurely advanced in one of his most famous essays, "Proprioception." This essay is examined in detail in the third chapter of the thesis. The third and final volume of Maximus was published posthumously in the fall of 1975. The editors gleaned from Olson's papers that the intended title was The Maximus Poems - Volume Three. Olson began teaching at the State University of New York at Buffalo in 1963, and in early 1964 his wife Elizabeth was killed in a car accident. Thereafter he returned to his home in the Portuguese section of Gloucester, leaving only to engage in poetry readings and occasional lectures. The final volume of Maximus is thus largely devoted to summation and self-examination; living alone in Gloucester he was able to scrutinize his own vision of the world.

The earliest poems and those written outside the Maximus series, are for the most part collected in the posthumous volume, Archaeologist of Morning (1970). A few poems are to be found in the little journals

2. This work is referred to both as Maximus IV, V, VI and Maximus volume II throughout the thesis.

to which Olson continued to submit his work, despite international recognition. His prose work is collected in several volumes, the major being Human Universe (1967), edited by Donald Allen, Selected Writings (1966), edited by Robert Creeley, The Mayan Letters (1965), also edited by Creeley, The Special View of History (1970), edited by Ann Charters, and Additional Prose (1974), edited by George Butterick. These last two volumes were published posthumously, and the collection of unpublished prose yet to come will also be edited by George Butterick. In addition, there are transcripts of Olson's major lectures, amongst them Poetry and Truth (1971) and Causal Mythology (1969).

For a man who did not write his first poem until the age of thirty, it is a most substantial corpus. Olson detested writers who could "only make a form ... by selecting from the full content some face of it, or plane, some part" (HU, p.5), and his dedication to physis thus necessitated the inclusion of the natural laws as modern physics increasingly revealed them. The influence of the physical sciences on contemporary literature is by no means rare. Perhaps the theory having the greatest impact, at least in fiction, is Einstein's "Special Theory of Relativity," which makes the measurement of time and distance dependent on an observer's location. With the discovery that the speed of light is finite, we now know, for example, that the stars we perceive could well have burned out thousands of years ago. Despite the fact that Einstein's theory was first published in 1905, the majority of people cling to the "common-place" notion of instantaneous perception. It was this lag in popular understanding which Olson lamented, not for the sake of knowledge pure and simple, but because of the ramifications for man's attitude to his world. That time and the measurement of

distance are relative to an observer, calls into question the relativity of "truth" in general. As Olson puts it, "the truth-unity/which has too many/references, and/breaks-down/all-the-time..."³ Many modern novelists have chosen to play upon the relativity of perception, long philosophically debated and now substantiated to a great degree by science. It is a primary theme in the work of Jorge Luis Borges, and similarly forms the basis for the plot of John Fowles' The Magus. Perhaps one of the most skillful manipulators of the relativity of perception is the young American novelist, Thomas Pynchon. His first novel turns on the search for the enigmatic "V," which as person or thing is never identified, and takes on as many embodiments as there are questing characters. His most recent novel, Gravity's Rainbow, explores the concepts of causality and determinism, which microphysics has also called into question. Heisenberg's "Principle of Uncertainty" pointed out that in microphysical investigations, man's gross instrumentation necessarily interferes with the results he would isolate; that is, he can determine an electron's momentum only by disturbing its position, and vice-versa. It is therefore impossible, within microphysical realms, to establish definitively that one event causes another. The evidence takes the form of statistics rather than proof. Some scientists, including Sir Arthur Eddington,⁴ have suggested that it is the will of man which holds the electronic constituents of matter together. Pynchon carries this notion to the macrophysical scale, focussing on the apparent conditioning of his oblivious central character, through concentric rings

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3. Olson, The Maximus Poems - Volume Three, ed. Charles Boer and George F. Butterick (New York: Grossman, 1975), p.122.
 4. See Sir Arthur Eddington, The Philosophy of Physical Science (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1939), pp.180-84.

of national and international cartels. One particular passage in Gravity's Rainbow imagistically delineates the electromagnetic fields which constitute all matter. Alfred North Whitehead, one of Olson's major influences, pictured the universe as an unending engagement of electromagnetic occasions, and Pynchon manages to give this cosmic mesh a concrete embodiment:

Halfway between the water and the coarse sea-grass, a long stretch of pipe and barbed wire rings in the wind. The black latticework is propped up by longer slanting braces, lances pointing out to sea. An abandoned and mathematical look: stripped to the force-vectors holding it where it is, doubled up in places one row behind another, moving as Pointsman and Mexico begin to move again, backward in thick moiré, repeated uprights in parallax against repeated diagonals, and the snarls of wire below interfering more at random. Far away, where it curves into the haze, the openwork wall goes gray. After last night's snowfall, each line of the black scrawl was etched in white. But today wind and sand have blown the dark iron bare again, salted, revealing, in places, brief streaks of rust... in others, ice and sunlight turn the construction to electric-white lines of energy. 5

But concepts that are to Pynchon literary embellishment and the substructure of his fiction, Olson incorporates directly into his own "philosophy of use," demonstrating how physics' revelations can productively touch on the everyday life of man. As well, he draws in the concept which virtually gave birth to modern physics, Faraday's electromagnetic field, in developing the poetic structure for which he is most famous. The "composition by field" methodology of "projective verse" grows out of the electromagnetic field, and in so basing his aesthetic, Olson carried to its furthest conclusion yet the "organic" shaping principle of the Romantics. The stance demanded by "projective verse" is, in fact, a variation on the disposition toward physis which Olson urged every man to adopt. His aesthetic theory is thus clarified by

investigating the total visionary philosophy. His life was consecrated to the unfolding of the "human universe", an engagement with physis which takes account both of man's real potentiality, and the laws of natural phenomena:

turn now and rise

Wrest the matter into your own .

hands - and Nature's laws ⁶

6. Olson, Archaeologist of Morning (London: Cape Goliard, 1970), p.185.

Chapter One

The Revolution of the World-Picture - Space and Matter as Fluidities

"I am not aware that we proceed in straight lines at all."¹ For Charles Olson this awareness signifies both his rejection of the traditional concepts of logical thinking, and his absorption of the new picture of the world as presented by Einstein in his theories of relativity. In the essays "Projective Verse" and "Human Universe," Olson had reviled the Greek habit of logos or discourse, the generalizing tendency which vitiated that force he values over all others, the particularity of any object or being. From "the Athenian Three"² we inherit a system of classification which divorces substance from its supposedly accidental attributes: "divided from each other and rattling, sticks in a stiff box."³ But his rejection of progression in straight lines is, of course, more than a repudiation of the rigid delineations of syllogism; Olson was very aware that Einstein had totally redefined the straight line when he postulated that a ray of light is deflected by a body's gravitational mass.⁴ Scientists now define a straight line as the shortest distance a ray of light will travel, and light moving anywhere in our universe will inevitably encounter some material body around which it will bend. The smaller the mass of the body, the smaller will be the curvature of the light ray, and a body of gravitational mass

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1. Charles Olson, The Special View of History, ed. Ann Charters (Berkeley: Oyez, 1970), p.35.
 2. Olson, Additional Prose, ed. George Butterick (Bolinas: Four Seasons, 1974), p.54.
 3. Olson, Human Universe, ed. Donald Allen (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p.119.
 4. It is important to keep in mind that both Einstein's "Special" and "General Theories of Relativity" were purely propositions when first published in 1905 and 1916 respectively. They have since, however, been repeatedly substantiated by experiment.

as great as the sun's will actually cause a ray of light to be deflected. As modern science increasingly reveals the structuring principles of the cosmos, "common-sense" notions are relentlessly upturned, and of these the usefulness of Aristotelian classification and the Euclidean conception of a straight line are merely two we must now approach with cautious qualification.

"What is measure" asks Olson, "when the universe flips and no part is discrete from another part except by the flow of creation itself, in and out...?" (HU, p.119). The flipping of the universe amounts here to much more than the loss of a Euclidean yardstick. Olson takes into account the flow of energy which is the consistency of matter itself. It was Alfred North Whitehead, one of the body of men able, as Olson puts it, "to catch us up"⁵ who introduced the term "simple location" to describe our conventionally naive attitude to material bodies which are not, in scientific fact, confined to the physical lineaments the eye perceives. Physics has substantiated that any concrete object is a state of agitated energy, whose influence extends into far distant regions:

Modern physics has abandoned the doctrine of Simple Location. The physical things which we term stars, planets, lumps of matter, molecules... are each to be conceived as modifications of conditions within space-time, extending throughout its whole range. There is a focal region which in common speech is where the thing is. But its influence streams away from it with finite velocity throughout the utmost recesses of space and time... It obstinately refuses to be seen as an instantaneous fact. It is a state of agitation, only differing from the so-called external stream by its superior dominance within the focal region. 6

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5. Olson, "Lecture, Black Mountain College, 1956" in Ann Charters, Olson/Melville: A Study in Affinity (Berkeley: Oyez, 1968), p.84.
 6. Alfred North Whitehead, Adventures in Ideas (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1933), p.201.

In the "flow of creation" Olson includes the continuously changing metric of space, what the nineteenth-century geometer, Riemann, called the "continuous manifold." In his "General Theory of Relativity" Einstein endorsed Riemann's supposition that the curvature of space is dependent upon the gravitational mass of the bodies which it surrounds. Yet another of our naive constructs is turned inside out, and space is no longer the empty and fixed receptacle in which objects are placed. Instead, it moves, changes, and is inextricably connected with the inertial mass of the world. By "the non-Euclidean penetrations" (HU, p.114) of the nineteenth century Olson maintains, man began to see that "reality was without interruption..." (HU, pp.118-19). It is the fluidity of the cosmos which becomes paramount, as Whitehead recognized when he defined physis simply as "process."⁷ Man, in a universe seen suddenly as alive and agitant at all points, forfeits his role as central manipulator, and becomes himself an integral part of the flow; he is possessed again of what Olson calls his "physicality." He is "a thing among things" (HU, p.118). Western man in particular has long conceived himself as the culmination of a progressive hierarchy of beings, but the picture of the world given us by Riemann, Einstein, and Whitehead among others, enables us to make "a re-entry of or to the universe" (HU, p.118). We can ease ourselves back into that fluidity of which we are a part. In the contemporary Maya, Olson saw a recognition of the commonness of all life in the very way they carried their flesh. There is none of our pulling away from what is contingent, the self-hugging misconception that we are each an absolute and totally self-contained law. Energies are pervasive and continuous:

7. Whitehead, Adventures in Ideas, p.192.

... they wear their flesh with that difference which the understanding that it is common leads to. When I am rocked by the roads against any of them - kids, women, men - their flesh is most gentle, is granted, touch is in no sense anything but the natural law of flesh, there is none of that pull-away which, in the States, causes a man for all the years of his life the deepest sort of questioning of the rights of himself to the wild reachings of his own organism. The admission these people give me and one another is direct... (HU, pp.6-7)

What the Maya as a people have not lost, the basic acknowledgement that they live in the midst of primordial energies greater than themselves, we must go now to contemporary physics to learn anew. Our contact with the particular energies of objects is muffled, the distorting effect of Aristotelian classification has "so overlayed our natures" (SV, p.24). Man's old humanism, "the notion of himself as the center of phenomena by fiat or of god as the center and man as god's chief reflection" (HU, p.8), must be replaced by the new; otherwise, we risk both damnation and destruction. It is the basic message of the "Projective Verse" essay; if a man sees himself as contained in that total process which is physis, he will be of use to himself and to others. If he derogates or denies those forces which sustain and hold him, he reduces himself to one of the "self-hugging grubs" pictured in "Maximus, From Dogtown - I:"

It comes to this: the use of a man, by himself and thus by others, lies in how he conceives his relation to nature, that force to which he owes his somewhat small existence. If he sprawl he shall have little to sing but himself, and shall sing, nature has such paradoxical ways, by ways of artificial forms outside himself. But if he stays inside himself, if he is contained within his nature as he is participant in the larger force, he will be able to listen, and his hearing through himself will give him secrets objects share (HU, p.60).

Art will be an emergence of process "as clean as wood as it issues from the hand of nature" (p.59), if man rests in the body of energies and tensions which sustain him. To lead man back to his proper diminished

status within that larger context, we can see as the total drive of Charles Olson's life work, and a new humanism and a new verse form were to be but two of the results. He determined to reinstate man in the imago mundi, whose depth, intensity, and speed we are just beginning fully to appreciate. The average man remains unaware of that picture we now have, and Olson would will us to bridge the gap:

The assumption is that everything's been turned about, and yet that that is true is not as known as anyone of us might think it is; indeed, I don't even know that any one of us is caught up and going at the speed or at the depth of both the knowledge of reality we now possess, and thus the speed and depth of the reality itself, especially as that reality is busy inside any-one of us (SV, p.15).

It is important to establish that the constant transformations of energy and space are not equivalent to chaos. In the essay, "Equal, That Is, to the Real Itself" Olson brings together the major scientific and geometric discoveries which have endowed us with proofs that reality is continuous; he combines a condensed history of the loosening of the Euclidean grip, Einstein's theory of gravitation, and brief but trenchant references to the distinct forms by which scientists now picture manifest energy. But these cumulative revelations lead Olson to the essay's final assertion that although "all does flow," it can be made permanent "if the means are equal" (HU, p.122). Permanence will consist in the forms which man conceives and creates, and "the equal means" is simply himself as instrument listening to "secrets objects share." In "Human Universe" (1950), Olson had defined chaos as "the most huge generalization of all" (HU, p.9), and he takes much care to demonstrate that "into whatever varying conditions" our fluid reality goes, "it can be followed" (HU, p.120). It is in following the lines of force that man comes to forms and shapes which make their own way.

It was perhaps the notion of "following" through transformation and distortion, which first attracted Olson to the branch of mathematics known as topology. Sometimes called "rubber sheet geometry," it can be defined as the study of continuity, a following of those properties of geometric figures which remain unchanged even when the figures are distorted. As Olson points out in "Equal, That Is, to the Real Itself," the Euclidean idea of congruence is "the measure of the space a solid fills in two of its positions" (HU, p.120). For this concept, it is necessary to imagine the uplifting of a rigid body from one position in space to another. Partially because of topology, however, we can now consider congruence as a one-to-one mapping of an object through its continuous transformations. There are no discontinuous jumps, as with Euclidean congruence, and it is a study thoroughly consistent with the actual conditions of our world. It is perhaps easiest in picturing congruence from a topological view-point, to imagine a piece of plasticine moulded into various shapes, without any breaks or joins being made. While a sphere, an ellipsoid, a cube, and a tetrahedron are all topologically equivalent figures, none of these is topologically equivalent to the surface of a torus, a figure which is shaped like a dough-nut.

One of the most curious topological figures is the Moebius strip, formed by making a simple twist in a long rectangular strip of paper, and then pasting the ends of the strip together. The resulting surface has only one side and one edge, as we can discover by tracing our finger along its boundary. Because a join is made, the Moebius strip is not topologically equivalent with the rectangle from which it is formed, but the transformation from two-sided rectangle to a one-sided band is interesting in itself. It makes play of our naive conceptions of

reality and appearance, for a simple twist transforms the figure into what we would think logically impossible. "The Moebius Strip" (1946) is, in fact, the title of one of Olson's earliest published poems, where he seizes on its image, the two-sided becoming one, to express the paradoxical wholeness of our world, built as it is on antithetical units and forces: "materials and weights of pain/their harmony;"⁸ in the poem, men and women confront each other in a violence of rape which is also leisure. Moreover, because the Moebius band has only one side, it is impossible to discriminate between its inside and outside. Olson depicts in the poem, the contorted body of a gigantic man; his head passes down the sky "as suns the circle of a year," and it is the mass of his body which determines earthly gravitation. So we can conceive a man's insides, whether his conceptions, or the very viscera and blood which allow him breath and speech, as inextricable from his external world. Without the forces of nature which surround him, man could not make forms. "The process of image" Olson writes in "Human Universe," ... cannot be understood by separation from the stuff it works on" (HU, p.10), and we can see a man's whole life as a working toward an image of the world, and his place within that world. Beginning with his specific energy, his inside or basic physiology, by breath and movement he makes form of the phenomenal universe which engages his attention outside. It is because the Moebius strip so well illustrates this sweeping figure of singleness which reality nonetheless makes up in all its confusions, that Olson selects it as a central image:

Their bare and lovely bodies sweep, in round
of viscera, of legs
of turned-out hip and glance, bound
each to other, nested eggs
of elements in trance.

8. Olson, Archaeologist of Morning (London: Cape Goliard, 1970), p.10.

Just as we can trace with our finger the sweeps of the Moebius band, assuring ourselves that it does in fact have but a single edge and side, so we can follow with certainty the transformations a body undergoes in topological deformation, the new congruence. But similarly, Olson insists, we can follow the transformations of space itself. The world has a metric structure, by which we mean largely the curvature of space around objects, and it is possible to plot its flexibility, mapping carefully point after point.

In his earliest major published work, Call Me Ishmael (1947), Olson made a conjectural leap, turning the amorphous abstraction which had been space into SPACE, capitalized as operative fact and force: "I take SPACE to be the central fact to man born in America, from Folsom cave to now."⁹ In Moby Dick Olson perceived Melville's intuitive awareness that space was more than an extended enclosure of things. He centres on "the stance" Melville took "toward the object moving in space" (HU, p.114), and the fact that "he manages almost any time he wants... to endow a more general space than other writers..." (HU, p.120). In "Equal, That Is, to the Real Itself," Olson points out that the major advances in non-Euclidean geometry were made largely contemporaneously with Melville's life and work. Within three years after Melville's birth, Bolyai and Lobatschewsky independently discovered that it was possible to construct certain geometries which defy the Euclidean law of parallels. Riemann, who illustrated that Euclidean models did not hold true on the surface of a sphere, and whose investigations led ultimately to the realization that "space is as fluid as time" (SV, p.27), delivered his inaugural lecture three years after the publication of Moby Dick. Melville knew nothing of all this, as Olson admits in the

9. Olson, Call Me Ishmael (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967), p.15.

essay, but perhaps because he was "an American, down to his hips in things" (HU, p.117), Melville developed an awareness of each object as a force so distinct that its participant tensions with the space surrounding it became instinctually apparent.

For Olson himself, the initial assertion of Call Me Ishmael came more from an intuitive "sensing" than any learned surety: "in that wonderful sense that one does what one knows before one knows what one does, I behaved better in Ishmael than I knew."¹⁰ He certainly had some awareness of non-Euclidean geometry by the early 1950's; he writes in a letter to Robert Creeley in 1951 of "Riemann, or any of those geometers who were really cutting ahead."¹¹ But it is the largest implications of space which continue to concern him, man's new knowledge of it as force which was to rebound on his conception of himself and of the world-structure:

Space is the mark of new history, and the measure of work now afoot is the depth of perception of space, both as space informs objects and as it contains, in antithesis to time, secrets of a humanitas eased out of contemporary narrows. 12

In illustrating the "depth of perception of space" required, Olson selects Melville's description of Ahab's sighting Moby-Dick just prior to the final chase. Melville manages to capture in the transformation from "white living spot" to the yawning mouth of the whale, the very extent of water through which the whale rises, the speed of its movement, and the intensity by which its "self-existence" (HU, p.6) impinges on

10. "Lecture, Black Mountain College, 1956" in Olson/Melville, p.86.

11. Olson, Mayan Letters, ed. Robert Creeley (London: Jonathan Cape, 1968), p.29.

12. Olson, "Notes for the Proposition: Man is Prospective," Boundary, II, 2 (Fall 73/Winter 74), p.2.

Ahab's being. All these elements are inextricable: the watery medium which we can take as space itself, the rapidity of the body in motion, and the particular impact of that body in context. There is neither diminishment of object by space, nor of space by object in the picture Melville presents:

But suddenly as he peered down and down into the depths, he profoundly saw a white living spot no bigger than a white weasel, with wonderful celerity uprising, and magnifying as it rose, till it turned, and then there were plainly revealed two long crooked rows of white, glistening teeth, floating up from the undiscoverable bottom. 13

In coming to an understanding of space as fluid, and the participant tensions of space and objects which hold the world together, we can follow, as does Olson in "Equal, That Is, to the Real Itself," the history of the loosening of Euclidean rigidities. It was Bolyai and Lobatschewsky who took the first step. Independently, the two geometers created a model which showed that through any given point an infinite number of lines could be drawn parallel to another line. After this initial modification of the traditional Euclidean hold on our geometric thinking, the German mathematician Georg Riemann, began working with the geometric laws which are applicable to the surface of a sphere. If we restrict our measurements and calculations to limited sections of the earth's surface, the Euclidean postulates will hold true. This is because the curvature of the earth is much too imperceptible to be noted by the human eye, and for most practical purposes we conceive of ourselves as inhabiting a perfectly flat plane. Riemann moved out, however, into the equally realistic condition of our earth as sphere, and taking its total surface into account, demonstrated that there are no parallel lines, and that the angles of a triangle

add up to more than 180° . In understanding this apparent paradox, it is important to keep in mind that on the surface of the globe the shortest distance joining any two points will be a curved line. But there is immediately a major deviation from the Euclidean rule, as we see that any of these "straight lines" on the globe's surface will meet in two points; any two meridians, for example, will meet at both the North and the South Poles. To illustrate that the angles of a triangle add up to more than 180° , we can either envision, or actually construct, a triangle on the surface of a globe. We can make such a model using familiar geographic points:

Consider the triangle formed by starting at the North Pole, going down the meridian of Greenwich until the equator is reached; there turn east and go a quarter of the way around the equator; you are now in longitude 90° E; turn to the north and go straight back to the North Pole, along the meridian 90° . This triangle has three angles each of which is a right-angle. The sum is therefore 270° . On the globe, the sum of the angles of a triangle is not a fixed quantity. The larger the area of the triangle, the larger the sum of its angles. 14

But in addition to uncovering the laws which hold true on the total earth surface, Riemann considered the substance of space itself, that medium through which we and other objects move. He created a distinction between the "discrete" and "continuous manifolds" in space. Olson analogizes the discrete to "the old system" including "discourse, language as it had been since Socrates" (HU, p.117). Riemann distinguished the discrete as having a principle of measurement already contained in the concept of the manifold; the principle of measurement for the continuous manifold, on the other hand, came from a source outside itself. He suspected that the external force which determined the measure of the continuous manifold was, in fact, the material bodies

14. W.W. Sawyer, Prelude to Mathematics (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1955), p.77.

of the world in their total mass, but it was not until 1916 that Einstein was able to postulate this scientifically, ^{and} his theory has since been repeatedly substantiated. The continuous manifold is thus continuously changing, dependent as it is on the placement and movement of bodies in our world.

Hermann Weyl,¹⁵ in his Philosophy of Mathematics and Natural Science describes a body in motion as actually "taking along"¹⁶ that space which we can think of as curved about its gravitational mass. The discrete manifold thus relates more closely to the old Euclidean system with its fixed criteria of measurement and comparison based on rigid forms. In viewing the Socratic sifting of substance from quality as an extension of the discrete manifold, Olson takes into account the Platonic abhorrence of change, and the inflexible realm of the ideal Forms. In addition, discourse or classification robbed any object of its innate intensity, and it is the essence of Riemann's continuous manifold that it establishes "quantity as intensive" (HU, p.117). Objects by their very quantity or mass are causally connected with the space which surrounds them, and by their movement are responsible for its changing structure. We can no longer so easily dismiss the "simple" things of the world, placing man in their midst as manipulator of inert counters. The discrete, then, brings with it a preconceived and inflexible sense of measure, whereas the continuous manifold is as fluid as its name, following the movements of bodies in their mass. Hermann Weyl draws the antithesis of a rigid latticed crystal and a liquid:

15. Weyl was a German mathematician who taught at Princeton University from 1930 until his death in 1955. Olson quotes from Weyl's Philosophy of Mathematics and Natural Science (1949) extensively in both The Special View of History and "Equal, That Is, to the Real Itself." He had certainly read this work by 1956, the year in which the lectures comprising Special View were delivered.

16. Hermann Weyl, Philosophy of Mathematics and Natural Science, trans. Olaf Helmer (1949; rpt. New York: Atheneum, 1963), p.87.

Euclidean space may be compared to a crystal, built up of uniform unchangeable atoms in the regular and unchangeable arrangement of a lattice; Riemannian space to a liquid, consisting of the same indiscernible atoms, whose arrangement and orientation, however, are mobile and yielding to forces acting upon them. 17

Science is still coming to terms with the elusive principle which we term space. What is certain is that we can no longer conceive of it as an empty vessel in which objects are arranged in their cosmic orders. As Hermann Weyl points out, no area of space is empty.¹⁸ It is permeated by electromagnetic fields and the inertial fields which surround matter. Throughout scientific history, the primary measuring principle in determining the bounds and consistency of space, has been the action of the light ray as it travels amongst concrete bodies. Einstein illustrated in his "General Theory of Relativity," that a light ray will curve around a gravitational mass, and this leads to our conception of space as curved around objects. With this explanation he revolutionized the Newtonian concept that bodies attract one another by a force the inverse square of their distance. His radical picture of gravitation was, in fact, based upon an apparently simple insight, his realization that a body's very inertia is responsible for its gravitational effects. The equality of any body's inertial and gravitational masses had been a well-known fact, even in Newton's time, but not until Einstein was this basic equality granted any significance in the operant world-structure. In "Equal, That Is, to the Real Itself" Olson defines inertia as a body's peculiar "calm, or passivity" (HU, p.122). Indeed, inertia is simply that property of matter by which a body will continue in its state of rest, or its uniform motion in a straight line,

17. Weyl, p.88.

18. See Weyl, p.172.

unless acted upon by some external force. The dramatic effects of which inertia is capable are familiar to us all. We are conditioned to expect, for example, the backward thrust of our body when the car we travel in is rapidly accelerated. It is an effect to which we are so accustomed that we doubtless take it for granted, and fail to question its origination. When two oncoming trains collide, it is their respective inertial masses which are responsible for the splintering of the wooden cars, for they resist the tremendous force suddenly operant upon them and the consequence is a complete sundering of the trains' physical structures. This is the power of the world's passivity, and in a famous thought-experiment, Einstein demonstrated that given certain conditions, it is impossible for a man to distinguish between the effects of gravitation and the effects of inertia:

We imagine a large portion of empty space... far removed from stars and other appreciable masses... let us imagine a spacious chest resembling a room with an observer inside who is equipped with apparatus. Gravitation naturally does not exist for this observer. He must fasten himself with strings to the floor, otherwise the slightest impact against the floor will cause him to rise slowly towards the ceiling of the room.

To the middle of the lid of the chest is fixed externally a hook with rope attached, and now a "being" (what kind of a being is immaterial to us) begins pulling at this with a constant force. The chest together with the observer then begin to move "upwards" with a uniformly accelerated motion...

But how does the man in the chest regard the process? The acceleration of the chest will be transmitted to him by the reaction of the floor of the chest. He must therefore take up this pressure by means of his legs... He is then standing in the chest in exactly the same way as anyone stands in a room of a house on our earth. If he release a body which he previously had in his hand... the body will approach the floor of the chest with an accelerated relative motion...

... the man in the chest will thus come to the conclusion that he and the chest are in a gravitational field... Of course he will be puzzled for a moment as to why the chest does not fall in this gravitational field. Just then, however, he discovers the hook in the middle of the chest and the rope which is attached to it, and he consequently comes to the conclusion that the chest is suspended at rest in the gravitational field. 19

As far as the man in the chest is concerned, he is now in a gravitational field, and the fact that his pull downward results from his body's inertial resistance to upward acceleration does not occur to him. Einstein did demonstrate effectively the identity of gravitational and inertial effects in his experiment, and it was this conclusive mental illustration which led him to attribute gravitation to a body's inertia. According to the "General Theory of Relativity," therefore, it is a body's inertial mass which causes a ray of light to curve around it, and as we have seen that our interpretation of space hinges on the behaviour of light, thus we realize that the curvature of space itself is dependent on the inertial mass of the body. We can think of the space curvature around any particular body as a local curvature. Obviously, there will be a total curvature around the assembled material bodies of the whole universe, and it is by the phrase "metric structure" of the world that Hermann Weyl signifies this all-comprehensive topology.

The universe flips in still another way, and we see now that "the inertial structure of the world is a real thing which not only exerts effects upon matter but in turn suffers such effects."²⁰ Olson italicizes this statement as does Weyl himself, so indicative is it of the new picture of the world which we must grasp. Not only do we value in a new way objects in their singularity, those particular energies which strike a man's sensibility, but we come to see the great structuring power implicit in inertia itself. It is a still further proof that a man impedes his own movement and possibilities when he depreciates non-living material as expendable, destroying what would sustain him:

... the inert
is as gleaming as,
and as fat as,

fish - so
we move... 21

20. Weyl, p.105 and Human Universe, p.122.

21. Olson, The Maximus Poems (New York: Jargon/Corinth Books, 1960), p.126.

In Philosophy of Mathematics and Natural Science, Weyl uses the term "metrical structure of the world" (p.103) by which we can understand the fluid concept of Riemannian space validated by the "General Theory of Relativity." As Einstein demonstrated, this metrical structure or space curvature, is dependent upon the gravitational mass of bodies, which we now know to be equivalent to their inertial mass. Both Olson and Weyl prefer to describe this as an "intimate connection" of the world's metric and inertial structure (HU, p.122 and Weyl, p.106). At the conclusion of "Equal, That Is, to the Real Itself," Olson creates a crucial syllogism: we know that the metric structure of the world is dependent on the inertial structure, and that the inertial structure is dependent on matter itself. But bodies move and the inertial structure or field must therefore be flexible, and we arrive back at that supposition which Riemann had made in the 1860's: space is fluid and its continuous changes are dependent on the movement of real bodies. In the essay "Human Universe" Olson presented definitively his belief that "art is the only twin life has" (HU, p.10), and thus the significance of a flexible metric structure amounts to much more than a simple revolutionizing of our "common-sense" notions of space. "Art is measure," Olson asserts at the end of "Equal, That Is, to the Real Itself" (HU, p.122), and its flexibility becomes imperative if, as the twin of life, it is to keep its structuring principles consistent with those of the natural world.

In the opening of the "Projective Verse" essay, Olson makes it clear that he rejects all rigid compositional forms which have been handed down, "inherited line, stanza, over-all form" (HU, p.52). This is the Euclidean definition of congruence; that a man must take his measure

by applying to himself some discrete form unconnected with his own physiology or essence. How is it possible for the open verse form to admit a fluidity the equal of that which characterizes the structure of the world? There is a very basic emphasis in "Projective Verse" on the body of the man who writes, what Robert Creeley calls the poet's "literal organism."²² We find the same stress in the early prose piece "The Resistance" (HU, p.47); Olson cuts through the humanist overlay of man as invincible soul and restores to us our proper condition: we are first and foremost flesh, bones, nerves, and blood and it is by means of this "house of flesh" that we are able to move and perceive the world. What "Projective Verse" particularly impresses on us is the idiosyncratic nature of the voiced breath of each man, as it is determined by the very blood within his veins and the volume of his chest for the intake of air. Robert Creeley has made it clear that he sees the creation of poetry as inextricable from the physiology of the writer:

I think each man writing will have some way, so to speak, intimate with his own condition. That is, I feel there will be an inherent condition for an ordering intimate to the fact of himself, as literal organism... one of the several virtues of Olson's "Projective Verse" was that of returning to poetry its relation with physiological condition. 23

And it is a man's breath, that particular product of his physiology, which determines the metric of the poem, the line-endings, and the weight of an individual syllable. Olson affirms all this in "Projective Verse:"

And the line comes (I swear it) from the breath, from the breathing of the man who writes... and thus is, it is here that, the daily work, the WORK, gets in, for only he, the man who writes, can declare, at every moment, the line its metric and ending - where its breathing, shall come to, termination (HU, p.54).

22. Robert Creeley, A Sense of Measure (London: Calder and Boyars, 1972), p.51.

23. A Sense of Measure, p.51.

But the introduction of the individual breath as the source of poetic form is no arbitrary decision. As Olson defines each object as having a "self-existence," that particularity which impinges on a man's sensibility, so we can see the specificity of human kind as the ability to reproduce reality through speech, the voiced breath. The use of breath in poetics is no automatic dispensation for the man already alienated from the forces which inform objects and himself, and it is for this reason amongst others that Olson takes Heraclitus' "Man is estranged from that with which he is most familiar," as epigraph for his Special View of History. We remain unaware of the power which is most specifically ours by birth and which properly would define our place within the structure of creation.

In The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry, Fenollosa drew attention to the etymological root of our pure copula "is" in the Aryan as "to breathe,"²⁴ and Olson incorporates this into "Projective Verse." Man's very existence is equivalent to breath and its possible extensions:

... breath is man's special qualification as animal.
Sound is a dimension he has extended. Language is
one of his proudest acts (HU, p.60).

It is the speech-force originating in the literal organism which enables man to make a thing which can "take its place alongside the things of nature" (HU, p.60), and allows poetic form to become once again twin to life. It is therefore toward an exploration of the possibilities of one's own body that Olson would push any man. "I believe... that all men and women can dance...",²⁵ he wrote to Cid Corman, and the movement of the body in those rhythms peculiar to itself, he sees as

24. Ernest Fenollosa, The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry (London: Stanley Nott, 1936), p.29.

25. Olson, Letters for Origin, ed. Albert Glover (London: Cape Goliard, 1969), p.102.

the most basic of all human forms of expression. In giving a detailed criticism of a poem Corman had sent him, it is the poet's innate rhythms on which he insists: "and there is no way of knowing any rhythm OTHER THAN YOUR OWN, than BY your own."²⁶ The capitalization is a gauge of the distance Olson feels the poet has fallen from the essential message; that by our own organism, by its disposition to external phenomena, and by the very uprising of breath through the trachea, we will find the metric and line-endings making their own way. That art is the product of one man's begetting, Olson fervently believed but this was in no sense the romantic urge to an egotistical gush of sentiment. "In the issue the act is one person's..." (LO, p.104) signifies rather man's rhythmic disposition to the forces which encircle him, only certain of which he will be attracted to, and the rhythm of his body proper, either as he explores space or as he speaks to give a syllable weight. Again, the key action is to abandon the humanist sprawl with all its utilitarian arrogation of objects, those powers which sustain us, and thereby define our role as participant. Through the acceptance of this smaller part man will paradoxically expand outward in his forms. If the poet drops bloated self-concepts, remembering that it is his organism which is his root, he will gain "projective size:"

But breath is man's special qualification as animal. Sound is a dimension he has extended. Language is one of his proudest acts. And when a poet rests in these as they are in himself (in his physiology, if you like, but the life in him, for all that) then he, if he chooses to speak from these roots, works in that area where nature has given him size, projective size (HU, p.60).

In the art of Sumer and in the glyphs of the Mayan people, Olson saw evidence of the highest respect for any single thing; their arts

26. Letters for Origin, p.83.

"retain the power of the objects of which they are the images," he affirmed in "Human Universe" (HU, p.7), and attendant on such respect, was the awareness that as individuals, they must similarly rest in their peculiar and participant powers. There is no sprawl, then, but a self-containment in that which is most our own:

...a Sumer poem or Maya glyph is more pertinent to our purposes than anything else, because each of these people and their workers had forms which unfolded directly from content (sd content itself a disposition toward reality which understood man as only force in field of force containing multiple other expressions (ML, p.68)

Form unfolds from content because both the Sumerian and Mayan peoples maintained a disposition toward nature which was respectful of the "multiple other expressions" of force, besides man himself. Einstein has given us the assurance that the metric of the world is fluid, and for Olson this necessitates an equally fluid metric in verse. But as science restores to us the awareness of all-pervasive force, "nothing was now inert fact..." (HU, p.118), so it pushes us toward an investigation of our own place in this new context. All nature's objects rest within and maintain their particular functions; the very inert character of matter, previously taken for granted, is revealed as cosmically purposive. Only man overreaches, thereby interrupting the flow of "the real itself" through his body as instrument. "Man as object in space as against man as subject of time....,"²⁷ Olson would have the transformation, and that we are objects is perhaps the most difficult admission. To rescue us from the fallacy that we live our lives independent of context, "what Socrates did was to isolate the value and thus raise and isolate the man-time from space-time" (SV, p.27),

27. "Notes for the Proposition: Man is Prospective," Boundary, II, 2 (Fall 73/Winter 74), p.4.

Olson places us in the expanse of space where we rightly learn that our experience depends on our placement, coincidence and contingency in space-time. In the breadth and depth of space we encounter and cannot deny, those other objects which make up our world, and as object, our own specificity is breath.

In one of his earliest poems "In Cold Hell, in Thicket" (1951), Olson looks at the dry, abstract world which has resulted from man's separation of himself from the primordial energies: "... words even/are made to taste like paper..." (AM, p.66). Aristotle's shaft driven between substance and quality has dispelled that force which the Maya were so careful to capture in stone, and "all things are made bitter..." We lie prone in a hell of our own making where "it is not easy/to know the tracteries, the markings/... by which space/declares herself..." Man has lost the vision of the Egyptian goddess Nut²⁸ arched over her brother the Earth. Geb "lies in stasis under her," and this is mythic realization that the mass of the world and the arch of the sky were most intimately connected. "Awkward stars drawn for teats to pleasure him," space was for the Egyptians what she was for Melville, "sweet milk" as Olson emphasizes in Call Me Ishmael (p.79). She is nourisher of the body beneath her hoop of stars: Einstein has renewed the vision in scientific theory, and we are granted another opportunity for salvation. The ability to see space in her fulness, and to move off from that fixity of the abstract in which our feet are planted, depends on as slight a thing as the body itself. Man "raises/on a reed....," the slender resistance which is his body, and it will be an important factor

28. Nut is the Egyptian goddess of the sky and upper air. She is usually depicted bending forward in a half circle over her brother the Earth. Her breasts hang down to nourish him.

in deliverance. Our art has become purely linear: marks in hammered metal, the intaglio against a lifeless backdrop; lines meet in sharp angles and there are neither arcs nor fluidity:

The branches made against the sky are not of use, are already done, like snow-flakes, do not, cannot service him who has to raise... (AM, p.67)

To come into the wholeness of nourishment which is earth and space as force, man must begin re-schooling himself in the appreciation of particulars, but because this is a deliberate task, the work will be tedious, seemingly beyond possibility:

as in this thicket, each
smallest branch, plant, fern, root
- roots lie, on the surface, as nerves are laid open -
must now (the bitterness of the taste of her) be
isolated, observed, picked over, measured, raised
as though a word, an accuracy were a pincer! (p.67).

Only through such isolated accuracies can we begin to learn the potency which things carry, and just as man's singular breath will bring him to "projective size," so a single object will lead us out into the totality of the world's energies. And realizing the pervasiveness of this force field, the arch which is space will once again become apparent:

By fixes only (not even any more by shamans)
can the tracteries
be brought out (p.68)

In a letter to Robert Creeley written in 1951, the year Olson composed "In Cold Hell, in Thicket," he uses the word "fix" to describe how the eye of man centres on an object's most vital nature. "The light of the body is the eye..." (AM, p.6), Olson had written in one of his earliest poems, and it is visual perception which can lead us to an irradiation of the whole, just as their directed gaze so unfailingly led those first, fresh, or primitive peoples who could transfer essence

to stone: "the eye, in Maya (other Indian as well) and Sumerian²⁹ fixes ... in those glyphs how, or stones, how... the eye takes up life..." (ML, p.69).

"There is nothing in the real world is merely an inert fact. Every reality is there for feeling: it promotes feeling, and it is felt."³⁰ The author is Whitehead but Olson lifts the statement almost bodily into "Equal, That Is, to the Real Itself," as substantiation of his own belief that the slightest object can be demonstrative of a cosmic structure. The fix of the eye eradicates the blindness born of abstraction and self-love, and gives us back that most open perspective of total space, the world field of intense and participant forces. This is largely the push of Whitehead's "philosophy of organism" which grows out of the electromagnetic field, "the topic of physical science."³¹ "I take it Whitehead has written the metaphysic of the reality we have acquired," Olson states in Special View (p.16), and the reality we have acquired is that continuous stream of energies of which objects are denser knots, or focal points of agitation. Whitehead's philosophy, therefore, is characterized by interpenetration and pervasive engagement. The final real things of the world he defines as "actual entities" or "actual occasions," and we can understand these as states of activity, the electromagnetic events which underlie the larger structure of electron and atom. A group of "actual entities" which are interrelated in some

29. Olson's enthusiasm for the Mayan and Sumerian glyphs corresponds to Pound's for the Chinese ideogram. With Sumer as the origin of our civilization, Olson saw their glyphs as the truest rooting of our own language. The Mayan hieroglyph he investigated himself in the summer of 1951 in Yucatan, exploring archaeological sites at his own expense.

30. Whitehead, Process and Reality (1929; rpt. New York: The Free Press, 1969), p.364.

31. Process and Reality, p.117.

definite fashion will make up a nexus, and an association of nexūs will in turn make up a society of occasions, either living or non-living. A man and a gull are living societies, a ridge-pole a non-living one.

It is the self-creativity of the universe that Whitehead wishes to impress upon us. One "actual entity" may develop an affective relation for another; there will be a resultant ingression or engagement of the desired entity by the subject, and the achieved unity will bring about a definite satisfaction, or sense of self-enjoyment. It is, of course, a continual process; the "actual entity" having achieved satisfaction becomes "objectively immortal," a stubborn fact or datum for use or engagement by other subjects. The identifying movement, then, is from object to subject. An "actual entity" presents itself as datum to the subject entity, and if the subject responds with a positive feeling, there will be ingression and a cumulative subjective satisfaction. Reality thus emerges from the internality of the "actual entities" themselves. When he wrote Process and Reality in 1927-28, Whitehead was confronted by a Western audience still clinging for the most part, to Newtonian principles. Descartes' dictum that a substance requires nothing but itself in order to exist had thoroughly infected our thinking, and man was indoctrinated with Newton's separation of matter and force; material bodies were isolated fixtures, and any interaction in which they engaged was the result of externally connecting forces, and ultimately, the intercession of God. For Whitehead, the mechanical view ignored what is obvious to the primordial eye, that "self-realization is the ultimate fact of facts."³² In his major works, Newton overlooked the coinherence of reality:

32. Process and Reality, p.260.

Newton's Scholium betrays its abstractness by affording no hint of that aspect of self-production, of generation, of φύσις, of natura naturans, which is so prominent in nature. For the Scholium, nature is merely and completely, there, externally designed and obedient...

In the Scholium, space and time... are ready-made for the material masses; the material masses are ready-made for the 'forces' which constitute their action and reaction; and space, and time, and material masses and forces, are alike ready-made for the initial motions which the Deity impresses throughout the universe. 33

Newton's theory of disconnected entities was prefaced by Descartes' division of the world into two primary concepts: physical extension which characterized material bodies, and consciousness, that agency responsible for supplying the extended bodies with those qualities distinguishing one from another. It is a philosophy reminiscent of the rigidities of Euclidean congruence, the mind injecting into bodies extended in space, attributes of colour, consistency, density, etc. It is a discontinuous movement, a picking up and a laying down at will of the essence of objects, a transferal of even quality by external force. No allowance is made for the intensity which the quantity of matter carries, and we can see Whitehead developing a "philosophy of organism" in reaction to the static mechanics which ruled science virtually until Faraday's imaginative discovery of the electromagnetic field in the 1860's. But for the layman, Newton's fixities still obscure our vision, and Olson would have us "catch ourselves up" to the insistence of Whitehead's entities as creatures:

The Cartesian subjectivism in its application to physical science became Newton's assumption of individually existent bodies, with merely external relationships. We diverge from Descartes by holding that what he has described as primary attributes of physical bodies, are really the forms of internal relationships between actual occasions, and within actual occasions. Such a change of thought is the shift from materialism to organism, as the basic stuff of physical science. 34

33. Process and Reality, pp.111-12.

34. Process and Reality, p.362.

Whitehead took the Aristotelian subject-predicate formula as insidious; it was a basic denial of the organic integrity of objects, and of the thorough-going interpenetration of those throbs of energy which are matter. He saw Process and Reality as essentially "a protest against the 'bifurcation' of nature. [And, indeed]... more than that: its protest is against the bifurcation of actualities."³⁵ Aristotle had split quality from substance, and Whitehead sought to deliver us again to the wholeness which actuality is in perceptual and scientific fact. He was to accomplish this by his theory of "prehensions," signifying simply the way in which an occasion of experience can include an entity of another type as part of its own essence. As Whitehead is careful to point out, the term carries with it no suggestion of either consciousness or representative perception. In his Special View of History, Olson defines "prehension" as "to seize with the hand or other member" (p.49), and it is perhaps easiest to think of Whitehead's organisms as capable of the fullest kind of touch and embrace; there is a pervasive contingency of occasions, and seizings of those entities presenting themselves as desirable data. Prehension therefore does away with the limited view that material bodies passively illustrate qualities.

The basic ontological principle contained in Process and Reality is that "everything is positively somewhere in actuality, and in potency everywhere.... the first step in the description of the universe [is] as a solidarity of many actual occasions" (p.54). In its attainment of self-realization, Whitehead conceives each actual entity as confronted with every other actual entity in the universe, concerning each of which it will have a positive or negative feeling; that is, as each

35. Process and Reality, p.340.

entity presents itself as datum, the subject entity willprehend it either positively or negatively, and we can think of it as engaging the whole universe of entities in this way. Whitehead can therefore affirm that "each actual entity includes the universe, by reason of its determinate attitude towards every element in the universe."³⁶ Energies, and the occasions of activity which structure energy, are marked by their interpenetrations, intersections, and prehensions of one another, and it is thus the universe in its totality which Whitehead restores to us. In "A Later Note on Letter # 15," Olson celebrates Whitehead's sealing of the Aristotelian and Newtonian splits, noting that he "cleared out the gunk/by getting the universe in..."³⁷ "Gunk" we can take as a compounding of "junk" and "gurry," Draining the object of quality, Aristotle and Descartes had left it an easily dispensable shell, the junk of creation. Newton's laws of "action at a distance" and his emphasis on the solitariness of objects, connected only through God's beneficent intercession, was a fallacy which obscured our vision for three centuries: gurry, the fishing offal which clogged Gloucester Harbour and detracted the eye from the sea. Olson sees Descartes' influence as infiltrating poetics within the philosopher's own lifetime, and remaining unalleviated from 1630 onwards, until Whitehead's decisive act:

In English the poetics became meubles - furniture -
thereafter (after 1630

& Descartes was the value

until Whitehead, who cleared out the gunk
by getting the universe in (as against man alone

For Olson, Descartes' empty constructs of extension and consciousness are mere furniture of the mind, moveable at will, lacking in both

36. Process and Reality, p.59.

37. Olson, The Maximus Poems IV, V, VI (London: Cape Goliard, 1968), p.79.

intensity and particularity, cut to the shape of man's mechanistic requirements. He believes fervently in "objects [as] originally motivating," asserting that "this is the doctrine of the earth" (AP, p.51); we come to this realization either by the fix of the eye which is primordial vision, or through Whitehead's scientific substantiation that "each individual occasion is transcended by the creative urge... [belonging] to the essential constitution of each such occasion."³⁸

We extract essence from object at our own peril, for in so doing we cut that line of communication which can lead us out to the universal field of force. Whitehead "got the universe back in" by conceiving self-creativity as equivalent to the universe in prehensive singleness:

Creativity is the universal of universals characterizing ultimate matter of fact. It is the ultimate principle by which the many, which are the universe disjunctively, become the one actual occasion, which is the universe conjunctively. 39

Olson takes this as substantiation of what he had previously known, but he had known it in a more direct way; it was his senses, his own admitting organism, which had first grasped that a single object or entity could elucidate a universe:

... a sharp, sure hunger of the senses that, if they pierce deep enough; if they ride this joy in the mortal particulars, they will find a dimension, a 'spiritual dimension' if you like, to satisfy the soul. 40

This movement from point or particular to a greater dimension was characteristic of Georg Riemann's topology. Hermann Weyl describes how Riemann was able to map points in a small neighbourhood of a

38. Adventures in Ideas, p.249.

39. Process and Reality, pp.25-26.

40. Olson, unpublished essay entitled "The Mystery" quoted in Robert von Hallberg, "Olson, Whitehead, and the Objectivists," Boundary, II, 2, pp.87-88.

manifold, and from this singular mapping extrapolate the manifold in its total topology or skeletal structure. "Only in the infinitely small may we expect to encounter the elementary and uniform laws, hence the world must be comprehended in the infinitely small."⁴¹ The italics are Weyl's, but Olson seized on the idea of a few singular points unfolding the whole of which they are a part. In "Equal, That Is, to the Real Itself," he notes Melville's awareness of the power of the "atomic," an awareness he could not have had without some sensing of topological unfolding:

..it is my experience that only some such sense of form as the topological includes... explains Melville's unique ability to reveal the very large (such a thing as his whale, or himself on whiteness, or Ahab's monomania) by the small (HU, p.120).

Through the "atomic" of the whale's tail, for example, Melville hits on the paradoxical compound which lightens the animal's whole essential dimension; there is a graceful gentleness in the seeming passivity, the inertial languor through sea and air, together with an implicit strength which horrifies:

I cannot demonstrate it, but it seems to me, that in the whale the sense of touch is concentrated in the tail; for in this respect there is a delicacy in it only equalled by the daintiness of the elephant's trunk. This delicacy is chiefly evinced in the action of sweeping, when in maidenly gentleness the whale with a certain soft slowness moves his immense flukes from side to side upon the surface of the sea; if he but feel a sailor's whisker, woe to that sailor, whiskers and all. What tenderness there is in that preliminary touch! 42

The concept of mapping was to remain an important one for Olson, and he naturally extends its applicability to the power of the single object to bring us to the wholeness of the universe itself. "A

41. Weyl, p.86.

42. Moby-Dick, p.386.

microcosm is literally as absolute as the other one" (AP, p.53), he states in his review of Eric Havelock's Preface to Plato, a work which painstakingly explores the reasons for Plato's rejection of the poets from his ideal society, and particularly, the philosopher's aversion to the Homeric epic. Olson uses the context of the review to bring to light once again how thoroughly Western man is entrenched in Platonic Forms and Aristotelian discourse, and thus how he fails to see that a microcosm is as absolute as any macrocosm we could imagine. Olson explains of the microcosm, "that something like ripples," and we can see the movement as an undulation from singular point to cosmic structure. Objects are indeed "originally motivating" for they give us back our awareness of a unifying imago mundi. That we recognize the "rippling" power of objects becomes an urgent matter for Olson and in the same review, he pushes the process of mapping at us as necessity:

That we require mapping. By topological law that the proximate: a microcosm is literally as absolute as the other one, and, in fact that something like ripples (AP, p.53).

The italics are Olson's and the stress on the proximate indicates more than just Riemann's near conjunction of points. In an unpublished and untitled paper of 1955, Olson defined image as "any proximate object to which there is a flow of feeling," and the significance of proximity here is the nearness of the man who participates in the process of image. In "Human Universe" Olson had described the making of image as an unbroken circuit, from object to image to action (action being either an achievement of form, or basic realization of the universe as unity). But it is obvious that neither the pure existence of an object nor man's proximity to it, is sufficient to bring into being an image capable of unfolding structure. There must first be a "flow of

feeling" from man to object, he having already assumed a stance toward reality which is open and respectful. Olson had made it clear in another early poem, "Concerning Exaggeration, or How, Properly, to Heap Up" (1953), that man does not simply find or pick up form in nature. It is rather a question of man's making himself "allowable," guarding the awareness that he and the object are on equal terms; that man is also object "knowing well how he is folded in" (HU, p.118). Our ability to map the ripple out from an object, therefore, depends on a preparatory stage. Riemann was able to map a manifold because the laws of interacting space and matter hold true. For man to map an object successfully point to point, he must similarly hold fast to his own law of "self-existence," "thing among things," neither denigrating nor abusing that energy by which he takes up image. And by that image we make, with no loss of energy in and out, we come to form:

however much it does lie
in particulars - as distorted as an instant is, is
content. And its form? How shall you find it
if you are not, in like degree, allowable, are not
as it is, at least, in preparation for
an equal act? (AM, p.104).

"Allowability" is our basic admission that the organism is receiver and transposer of the energy offered by the proximate object; it is the realization that "the skin itself, the meeting edge of man and external reality, is where all that happens does happen, that man and external reality are so involved with one another that, for man's purposes, they had better be taken as one" (HU, p.9).

Where Whitehead was to substantiate Olson's initial belief in the irradiating powers of the particular object, so the "philosophy of organism" with its "structures of activity" in energy was to corroborate

the earlier speculation of Olson's "Projective Verse" essay.

"Projective Verse" was written in late 1949, and Olson did not come to read Whitehead until 1955. Rather than any scientific work proper, much of the source material for the essay would seem to be drawn from Ernest Fenollosa's Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry. Although Fenollosa centres his discussions of energy and natural process around the Confucian concept, he was not unaware that the physical sciences had drawn similar conclusions. Weyl describes the history of science from Newton to Faraday as a supplanting of concrete substance by the principles structuring and connecting bodies; "gradually the constructive dynamic properties of matter displaced its substantial ones and rendered them superfluous."⁴³ Fenollosa asserts that "valid scientific thought consists in following as closely as may be the actual and entangled lines of force as they pulse through things."⁴⁴ He thus defines the noun much as Whitehead does his creatures or actual entities. Objects cannot be extricated from those energies which pervade them; they are, in fact, those energies:

A true noun, an isolated thing, does not exist in nature. Things are only the terminal points, or rather the meeting points, of actions, cross-sections cut through actions, snap-shots. Neither can a pure verb, an abstract motion, be possible in nature. The eye sees noun and verb as one: things in motion, motion in things. 44

As Whitehead pictured organisms prehending other entities as data, and then becoming "objectively immortal" or data themselves, so Fenollosa saw that the basic truth of nature is the transference of force from agent to object and object to agent. He pointed out that both the English and Chinese languages follow this "temporal order in causation"⁴⁵

43. Weyl, p.169.

44. Fenollosa, p.16.

45. Fenollosa, p.14.

in their sentence forms. In English we say "Man sees horse," following the actual transference of force as it occurs in time. Olson takes up Fenollosa's description of the sentence as "the first primary act of nature" (HU, p.57), selecting his example of the flash of lightning passing between the two terms of cloud and earth, as the most instructive image. The speed of light is the limiting velocity in our cosmos; we know of nothing which can exceed it, and Olson would have the energy of the poem propelled at just such a rate.

Fenollosa was as aware as Whitehead that the "entangled lines of force" were cosmically entangled, and a sentence encompassing all the interrelating acts of force would therefore take all time to pronounce:

... in nature there is no completeness... The truth is that acts are successive, even continuous; one causes or passes into another. And though we may string never so many clauses into a single compound sentence, motion leaks everywhere like electricity from an exposed wire. All processes in nature are interrelated; and thus there could be no complete sentence (according to this definition) save one that it would take all time to pronounce (p.15).

What Olson gained from Fenollosa was the assertion that energy and energy transference were the primary constructs in the natural world. Working again with his belief that "art is the only twin life has," and building on Fenollosa's identification of nature's acts and the grammatical sentence, Olson came to demand that the poem "at all points, be a high energy-construct and, at all points, an energy-discharge" (HU, p.52). The poet takes his energy from some source in the external world, and transfers it by means of the poem, "all the way over to" the reader. In this transaction there must be no loss of force, no leakage of energy. It is for this reason Olson insists that the split second acts, perceptions, the striking of syllables on the ear, and

the pressures of breath in speech, are crucial to the going energy of the poem's composition. We know now that there is no such thing as instantaneous propagation, but it is the instant which Olson nevertheless emphasizes. He urges that each man maintain a poise of his organism such that he can implement what his nerves and senses grasp, with a speed approximating that of light. For the poet, any lag or lapse will mean the loss of the poem's pulsation of content, and hence of its form:

... get on with it, keep moving, keep in, speed, the nerves, their speed, the perceptions, theirs, the acts, the split second acts, the whole business, keep it moving as fast as you can, citizen. And if you also set up as a poet, USE USE USE the process at all points, in any given poem always, always one perception must must must MOVE, INSTANTER, ON ANOTHER! (HU, p.53).

The tenor of the prose is, as Olson admits himself, dogmatic. But the very principle which structures life must be applied to the poem, and Olson piles muscular phrase on phrase to push us to that most basic understanding. In "Human Universe" he distinguishes speech from discourse as "the act of the instant" and "the act of thought about the instant" (HU, pp.3-4). It is the instantaneous perception with which language should concern itself. Olson's intention here is not that man is now deprived of thought, but that thought is rather centred in that circuit of object to image to action, which the flow of feeling initiates. It was Fenollosa who pointed out that there are no purely copula verbs in English grammar, giving as illustration the etymological root of "is" in as "to breathe," of "exist" in "to stand forth or show oneself," and of "be" in bhu "to grow." Olson incorporates these equivalents directly into the body of the "Projective Verse" essay, and again we can see the equation of being and breath as crucial. There are two halves to the open poem as Olson defines it: "the head, by

way of the ear, to the syllable" and "the heart, by way of the breath, to the line" (HU, p.55); syllable and line, therefore, are elements whose energy must above all be guarded. The syllable, "the smallest particle of all" (HU, p.53), strikes the ear in a reverberating split second, and it is that immediately impinging weight which is capable of transferring force to another syllable, thus leading the harmony on. But it is man's breath "at every moment" as Olson stresses it, which declares "the line its metric and ending," and that breath will vary moment to moment as the syllables and words he speaks vary in innate weight and stress. It is not substance, therefore, Newton's isolated object, a set concept of foot or line, which gives "Projective Verse" its configuration. The total "concrecence" to use Whitehead's term for achieved self-realization, results rather from the internal connections, the transference of energy from individual impulse to impulse, syllable to syllable, breath to breath.

It is essentially Faraday's revelation of a "field," rather than "action at a distance," giving rise to electromagnetic phenomena, which underlies the "field" of the poem examined in "Projective Verse," although Olson may initially have had in mind the internally regulating principle in the force field of magnetism proper. It was Faraday's idea which "shook loose" in the nineteenth century, and which was ultimately to restore us our fluent cosmos: "All things did come in again in the 19th century. An idea shook loose, and energy and motion became as important a structure of things as that they are plural, and, by matter, mass" (HU, p.118). Fluidity is once again given its primacy, and it is a recovery of Hesiod's cosmogonic vision which meant so much to Olson, Okeanos' heavenly stream wrapping in the whole. It becomes imperative that the poet adopt that stance toward the poem

which God maintains toward the world, "a tender care that nothing be lost."⁴⁶ Each particle of the poem projects into fullness, and its loss will inhibit movement.

"Energy and motion become as important" as the fact that things are mass; in his preliminary lectures for The Special View of History, Olson had grasped Whitehead's instructive distinction between the vector and the scalar, vector being a force which has magnitude and direction, and scalar that having magnitude but no direction.⁴⁷ It was "the dominance of the scalar physical quantity" in Newtonian physics, Whitehead feels, which obscured what should have been a basic human recognition, that "all fundamental physical quantities are vector..."⁴⁸ Newton and his contemporaries were trapped within the stolidity and mass of objects, unable to pierce the bounds and perceive that the interconnections were real and diffuse. The world structure is "no longer THINGS but what happens BETWEEN things" (HU, p.123), Olson declares, absorbing Whitehead's instruction that "the ultimate physical entities for physical science are always vectors indicating transference."⁴⁹ It was, of course, Fenollosa's insight that the basis of nature is the act of transference, and thus we see world and poem as the darting of energy from particle to particle. Whitehead had relieved the bifurcation of nature and actuality through his theory of prehensions, and a prehension is identified by its reference to the external world; "it is thus said to have a vector character."⁵⁰ Energy must be carried

46. Process and Reality, p.408.

47. "Lecture, Black Mountain, 1956" in Olson/Melville, p.85.

48. Process and Reality, p.205.

49. Process and Reality, p.279.

50. Process and Reality, p.23.

in from the outside, to that immediacy which lives. Otherwise, all is static equilibrium. Man shrivels to a husk without his external reference to that other universe, and like Whitehead's completed organism, we bear the marks of the data from which we grow.

In Process and Reality Whitehead condensed the vector-scalar transformation in simplicity: "In physical science... scalar quantities are constructs derivative from vector quantities. In more familiar language, this principle can be expressed by the statement that the notion of 'passing on' is more fundamental than that of private individual fact" (p.245). We move from the tightened self constraints of Newton's physical isolates to the sinuosity of Okeanos. Process and fluidity, according to contemporary physics, are more fundamental than extended substance. We see Nut arch in fullness and we move. But with his rigid compartmentalization of matter and quality, Aristotle was as guilty as Newton of the substance fallacy, and we have in addition, these indoctrinations to overcome. Again, Whitehead is able to reduce the problem to its essence: "The taint of Aristotelian logic has thrown the whole emphasis of metaphysical thought upon substantives and adjectives, to the neglect of prepositions and conjunctions."⁵¹ Prepositional force, therefore, is vector force, and conjunctions indicate the unbrokenness of the process of transference.

The initial letter of the Maximus series, "I, Maximus of Gloucester, to You," written contemporaneously with the "Projective Verse" essay, is fittingly a poetic vector, a compilation of many particular acts of transference. It culminates, or rather ends poised on a thrust of vector force, from Olson to the reader. As in so many of his poems, there is no absolute termination in an editorial conclusiveness.

51. Adventures in Ideas, p.336.

There is a fiat at the end of the first Maximus letter, but it is a fiat which leaves open, and urges us towards, all possibility. The force has been transferred to our hands, to our nerves if you like, and Olson challenges us to take it up. We can see all the letters from Olson's Maximus as vectors, a sending forth of a rippling energy current which is to be caught up and sustained, but the energy is potential for our use, and by our physiology and particular data selection, we make it our own. The first Maximus letter, therefore, ends open:

from where I carry you a feather
 as though, sharp, I picked up,
 in the afternoon delivered you
 a jewel,
 it flashing more than a wing,
 than any old romantic thing,
 than memory, than place,
 than anything other than that which you carry
 than that which is,
 call it a nest, around the head of, call it
 the next second
 than that which you
 can do! (MI, p.4).

There is evidence also of Whitehead's attention to prepositions, although Olson was not to read Adventures in Ideas, his introduction to the "philosophy of organism," until five years after the poem was written. But he had fixed his eye, as had the Sumerians and the Maya, and he knew what was happening. There is first the insistence on the localization of energy, that we keep our gaze directed at the place it is pulsating with no distractions or detractions by thought. "There must be a way which bears in instead of away, which meets head on what goes on each split second..." Olson had yearned in "Human Universe" (HU, p.6), and in the final section of the poem the eye goes "in," seizing on the immediacy of the object's law, "strut after strut," the transference of energy from point to point along an arc, the single acts of which any

object is compounded:

in! in! the bow-sprit, bird, the beak
 in, the bend is, in, goes in, the form
 that which you make, what holds, which is
 the law of object, strut after strut, what you are,
 what you must be... (p.4)

The drive is home to satisfaction, whether of an object caught at an optimum moment by vision, or of a man-made form. The bow-sprit, bird, and beak are arrows at their forward thrusting point. The direction is onward and they point us "in."

As there is a continual going forth into form, so we realize that there has been a coming forth. In attaining satisfaction Whitehead's organisms have made a previous reach for data. It is the immediacy of cumulative self-enjoyment we see; the actual prehensions belong to the past. "In the language of science" Whitehead explains, "... the quantitative intensity of localized energy bears in itself the vector marks of its origin..."⁵² It is particularly in the nest of the bird that we are brought to an awareness of the components, those materials which were vectors, and now contribute to the whole being. Olson indicates the "vector marks of origin" simply by the preposition "of,"

born of yourself, born
 of hay and cotton struts,
 of street-pickings, wharves, weeds
 you carry in, my bird

of a bone of a fish
 of a straw, or will
 of a color, of a bell
 of yourself, torn (p.3)

It is both the bird's nest and man's nest of form. Both come into being through vector transference, and man cannot find form without this basic external referent. The nest of the bird is very appropriate

52. Process and Reality, p.138.

in that it is continually an unfinished thing, as open to new vector transference as is the conclusion of the poem itself. "[The thing you're after/may lie around the bend/of the nest..." (p.1): it is "next" as well as "nest," the next second, the next transferal, the next thing to be made. In his letters to Cid Corman, in preparation for the first publication of this "Maximus," Olson referred to the poem as itself "a bow-sprit" (LO, p.29); it is an embodiment of vector movement, and the repetition of preposition and prefix in "bow-sprit for/forwarding" (p.2), is not accidental but deliberately weighted in recognition of the ultimate nature of things. Reality as we now understand it, is ultimately a passage from point to point. In "In Cold Hell, in Thicket" Olson had urged each man to make of himself a vessel (AM, p.67), in keeping with the most fundamental of nature's constructs:

...let the working hypothesis be that the ultimate realities are the events in their process of origination. Then each event, viewed in its separate individuality, is a passage between two ideal termini... there is nothing in the Universe other than instances of this passage and components of these instances. 53

Lucretius had called it the "flying dart,"⁵³ the hurling of past fact into "transcendent fact." For Olson it is the bow-sprit, the bird, and the beak.

This passage of energy between two termini is characterized by an assertive wholeness. As Whitehead makes clear in Adventures in Ideas, "energy has recognizable paths through time and space" (p.238). We can, in fact, think of physis as having a paradoxically dual nature. The continuity of energies which Faraday speculatively imagined as "field" has increasingly revealed itself as simultaneously incorporating an

53. Adventures in Ideas, p.227.

"atomic" or "individual" principle. Although we can think of the totality of cosmic energies as continuous and uninterrupted, the actual passages between termini are equivalent to discrete bundles or energy wholes. Whitehead saw this "individual" aspect of physical nature becoming as important as the fact of continuity:

... the concept of continuity was dominant in Clerk-Maxwell's thought. But the alternative concept of distinguishable individualities has again emerged into importance in the more recent physics. Electrons and protons and photons are unit charges of electricity; also there are the quanta of the flux of energy. These contrasted aspects of nature, continuity, and atomicity, have a long history in European thought, reaching back to the origin of science among the Greeks. The more probable conclusion is that neither can be dispensed with...⁵⁴

It was Max Planck who discovered in 1901 that energy is emitted and absorbed by electrons in discrete quanta or energy packets. The nucleus of any atom is surrounded by at least one orbit of an electron. Where an atom has several orbits, an electron will jump whole orbits outwards as it gains energy. This is the significance of the quantum leap. The electron loses no energy in its passage: its movement is wholly assertive since the amount of energy it absorbs correlates exactly with the jump to be made. If an electron reaches the furthest outer orbit of an atom, it is still capable of absorbing a quantum of energy. Should the quantum be sufficiently large, the electron will be enabled to leave this outer orbit, thus becoming a free agent. In the compressed "Grammar - a book," Olson had described Planck's quantum in this way: "the process is not continuous /pattern/ but takes place by steps, each step being the emission or absorption of an amt. /sic/ of energy known as the quantum" (AP, p.27). They are his italics and his use of "step by step" indicates the stress he would put on the intrinsic, definitive action of energy itself. We can see its determination emerging from self-existence; the law of energy is implicit in its own character. Olson's statement that the "process" is not

54. Adventures in Ideas, p.238.

continuous need not be confusing when we realize that he is speaking of the individual vector passages, and not of the total cosmic process in its eternal and single sentence-form. As Whitehead points out, the flow of total energies throughout the cosmos is certainly continuous, but the energy emitted in quantum jumps constitutes definitive wholes, events in themselves, and this "atomic" characteristic of physis must be taken into account. We can relate this easily to the double-sided nature of man which the Maya still grasp in its essence: as individuals we bear a unique self-existence, but we are simultaneously part of "the company of the living" (SV, p.25), the totality of cosmic energies which transfuse our being.

What quantum establishes is the law implicit in energy and therefore in the substructure of physical matter itself. In "Grammar - a book" Olson took care to establish the etymological roots of the Latin adjective quantus, tracing it to the Latin pronoun for person, quis, and to the Greek equivalent, posos. Much of the confusion in our conventionally naive attitude to matter stems from the fact that we think of the English "quantity" as adjectival, as an attribute of matter rather than the intensity which it is in actuality. Reinstating its equivalence to personal pronoun, Olson stresses the definitive, affirmative action at the root of matter. "Nature takes nothing but leaps" (LO, p.11), he wrote to Cid Corman, and the whole ratios in which atoms emit energy, are as marked and positive as man's own steps across a field. Planck's quantum theory thus amplifies Olson's rewriting of quantity "as intensive."

Refining upon Planck's quantum jump, Niels Bohr conceived his theory of complementarity; Hermann Weyl has described this apparently



paradoxical discovery succinctly:

It depends on the concrete situation of their observation, on the instruments we train on them, whether photons or electrons reveal themselves to us as either waves of definite frequencies or as corpuscles that hit here or there. Bohr has coined the word complementarity for this basic feature of the new quantum mechanics that in a sense replaces the old polarity of matter and force.⁵⁵

Dependent on the instruments of study, therefore, light may manifest itself as either a photon or a wave; and an electron as either a corpuscle or a wave. Thus what Bohr's theory of complementarity discloses is that "light is not only ether wave but also corpuscle, an electron is not only a corpuscle but a wave."⁵⁵ Olson incorporates this balanced statement into "Equal, That Is, to the Real Itself," almost verbatim (HU, p.121). As Weyl points out, complementarity goes a long way toward demolishing the traditional antithesis of matter and force. Revealing itself as a corpuscle, a pulsing beat of localized energy, an electron can easily be analogized to substance. But it is also a wave, that undulatory formation by which we normally picture energy or force. And this complementary picture which the electron gives us is an essential construct in all matter. Quantity, therefore, is proven dually intensive; it is both substantial force and forceful substance.

The wave half of complementarity we can relate to the rippling action of Olson's microcosms or particulars. The ability of an object (given man's allowability) to unfold a universe of meaning from itself, informs Olson's concept of image. The joy of image is that the intensity of the object stays with that object; there is no loss of force by comparison with another, the old ploy of simile, nor any

55. Weyl, p.88.

derogation, as with trope, when a part is slivered out to represent the whole. Olson had warned against this waste of inherent power in "Projective Verse," where the guarding of immediate pulsing is the pre-eminent task:

For there is a whole flock of rhetorical devices which have now to be brought under a new bead... Simile is only one bird who comes down, too easily. The descriptive functions generally have to be watched, every second, in projective verse, because of their easiness, and thus their drain on the energy which composition by field allows into a poem. Any slackness takes off attention, that crucial thing, from the job in hand, from the push of the line under hand at the moment... (HU, p.55)

Removal of attention from the object is the most damning slackness of all; it is Pound's parable of Agassiz and the decomposing sunfish in ABC of Reading,⁵⁶ and in "Equal, That Is, to the Real Itself," Olson chastises all those critics who impose on Moby-Dick the wasting devices of symbol and allegory. To Olson's mind, Melville was the first of Americans to recognize quantity as intensive, and judging by the tender care with which he treats any object moving through space, we could not expect the objects in his novel to be anything less than they are. Olson remarks on the whale itself as example, "what an unfolding thing it is as it sits there written 100 years off, implicit intrinsic and incident to itself" (HU, p.121). It is intrinsic to itself; that is, it is corpuscle, but in addition it unfolds, and is therefore wave. This rippling outward to some larger construct is no loss of force. As we have seen, complementarity establishes wave and corpuscle as two variations of a single factor. It is again a question of man's making himself allowable; the touch of the object is as direct and whole as the quantum which is emitted by the atom. By initiating a flow of feeling, Olson maintains, we will grasp the object as both entity and ripple. The difference is again that of Riemannian topology and

55. Weyl, p.88.

56. Ezra Pound, ABC of Reading (1934; rpt. New York: New Directions, 1960), p.17.

Euclidean geometry. Riemann was able to map one to one the entire generalized skeleton of the manifold. We can follow point by point the entire curvature without breaks or gaps. On the other hand, as Olson demonstrates, symbol and simile set up two distinct rigidities requiring us to make a relational leap; the movement is not naturally continuous. There is a gap into which the power flows, and the implicit strength is squandered: "mirror and model are each figures in Euclidean space, and they are not congruent" (HU, p.121).

The object has the power to remain implicit and yet to carry us outward, and Olson finds complementarity a most useful demonstration of this truth. In complementarity we see as well, evidence of the trust which Olson placed in the natural unfolding of form from content. "Form is never more than an extension of content," Olson took the aphorism from Robert Creeley wholly into "Projective Verse," and its application is perhaps as simple (or as complex) as the fact that an electron is both corpuscle and wave. Reducing nature to its final real entities, we find that form is implicit. We could, for example, interpret the wave formation as the form to the corpuscle's content. They are inextricable. One is, in fact, the other. So Olson places his faith in the capacity of the syllables, whole words, articulated breath, to reveal that form implicit in their particularities. It is again the poet's allowability on which the emergence of form depends: his scrupulous listening to the syllables, his thorough familiarity with his own organism and breath articulations, and his respectful disposition toward the external world.⁵⁷ One of the primary emphases of "Projective Verse" is that the elements of the poem, "the syllable, the line, as well as the image, the sound, the sense" be treated "just as solidly

57. "Chapter Four - The Field" attempts a brief examination of Olson's methodology in action.

as we are accustomed to take what we call the objects of reality" (HU, p.56). But we have seen that the objects of reality are capable both of being themselves, and of revealing the macrocosm or larger construct, and that the inextricability of content and form is shafted as deeply into matter as the quanta of energy themselves. "And its form? How shall you find it/if you are not, in like degree, allowable..." (AM, p.104) Olson inquires, and the implication, of course, is that we will find it in particulars if we are allowable. The actual unfolding of form in an open verse poem is extremely difficult to demonstrate. The key word is perhaps "recognition" which Olson uses in "Projective Verse" interchangeably with "composition." The poet as he writes, and the reader as he reads, will presumably recognize whether or not there is fittingness of form. Robert Duncan has described the poem which falls short: "it does not sound like what it says,"⁵⁸ and the achievement of form we would know as the reverse. It would sound "right" to us, and give evidence of the self-enjoyment experienced by Whitehead's organisms.

To come to the revolutionized picture of the world, and the self-determinative track of the poem, the appreciation of space as force must be an initiatory step. The principal move, perhaps, is to dispel the idea of vacancy, that space is simply that void which allows us the air we breathe, and unimpeded movement. To come under the flexing arc is to see Nut as integral to the cosmic structure. Electromagnetic fields permeate the known cosmos. Not globes placed by God at arbitrary points in infinite blackness, but movement and action involving both space and matter, inform the world we now have. There are no empty spaces; Whitehead's prehensions tightly mesh in reality, and

58. Robert Duncan, "Notes 1973: A Psycho-Physiognomy," Maps, 6 (1974), p.46.

the vector leaps from terminus to terminus are continuous. Olson's choice of "projective" to identify his open verse form admits space in all her plenitude. Projective geometry is properly defined as the geometry of visual space; that is, it deals with those properties which we see as they are revealed by light. We can describe projective properties as those which are preserved when a photograph is taken; we continue to see straight lines, points, and particular points on a line. This geometry resulted, in fact, from artists' studies of perspective. Although it was at first considered a branch of Euclidean geometry, it was eventually established as an independent subject, and it is possible, beginning with projective geometry, to derive Euclidean postulates from it. H.S.M. Coxeter, whose work Non-Euclidean Geometry Olson read prior to writing "Projective Verse,"⁵⁹ sees the projective as including all other geometries: Euclidean, as well as Bolyai and Lobatschewsky's hyperbolic geometry, and Riemann's elliptic. Projective, as that geometry which treats solid bodies and space as they are visually perceived, is a most natural starting-point and a most appropriate previous term for those other geometries which can be seen as its derivatives. The term "projective," therefore, embraces space in all her variations, and its inception is due to the eye, that first fix which can grant us the knowledge of the fluid whole.

Two of the descriptive under-titles with which Olson supplies "Projective Verse" share the prefix "pro," which in "projective" we can take as the whole forward movement of space in its variations, culminating in the continuous flow. The "pro" of "projectile" is vector, the

59. In "On Black Mountain" and interview with Olson at Beloit College in 1968 [Maps, 4 (1971)], he clarifies that when writing "Projective Verse" the term "projective" was then "fresh" in his mind, and implies that he had read Coxeter's work just prior to the essay's composition (See p.33).

thrust forward of the energizing immediacy, and "prospective" is that state of being forward looking, not to some idealized future time, but to that pulsing which is exactly contingent on this instant, that force which we can "right now hereinafter erect" (MI, p.4). "Percussive" re-endows syllable with its own weight; the striking of sound on the tympanum is forcible and reverberates to more than sound. This solidity which Olson gave back to syllable and to all the elements of the poem, we can relate to the art he called "logography." He had been long attracted by the exactitude of hieroglyphs, particularly their capacity "to retain the power of the objects of which they are the images" (HU, p.7). This retention of the object's power he wished upon the English noun, and he sought consistently to make words realize the full potency of their origins, by calling attention to their etymology. In drawing us back to the roots of a noun or verb, Olson restored its primacy, that initial strength which had evinced the precision of the Maya in stone. Robert Duncan has said that for Olson "the 'birth' of the word is its initial truth (its 'Golden Age' or Before-the-Fall root is its true meaning)."⁶⁰ "Words then are naming and logography is writing as though each word is physical" (AP, p.51), Olson instructed his student Charles Doria, and in his emphasis on syllables and words as real solidities, we can more easily understand the reference in "Projective Verse" to the "space-tensions" of a poem (HU, p.56). As space curves around the gravitational mass of objects in the real world, so it will curve around the mass of the word or breath-grouping, in the poem. The spacing in typography becomes as important as the verbal entities, indicating as it does, the cohesiveness of the whole, and the speech-force or emphasis which any particular word or group of words has been accorded. Within a poet's lifetime, the value given

60. Letter to the author, November 25, 1974.

any particular vowel may change. Robert Duncan has affirmed, "they are the least lasting sounds in our language; even in my lifetime, the sound of my vowels alters. There is no strict vowel standard;"⁶¹ and this ongoing variation of sound can be applied to Olson as well.

Olson saw the typewriter "with its rigidity and its space precisions" (HU, p.57), as uniquely capable of indicating breath-pauses, those spaces by which the weight of a word separates itself from others.

Our new awareness of space influences the poem not only by defining metric as flexible (thereby bringing breath back as measure), but in addition, gives new force and significance to those blanks left between words. That spacing is no mere artistic embellishment we can see from Olson's life-long interest in typography; "printers never believe the spaces I leave are serious" (LO, p.38), he complained to Cid Corman, and Robert Duncan has recently declared that he will publish new work on his own press, principally because commercial publishers have taken such liberties with his spacing.⁶²

Our knowledge of the curving of space by matter, and of the capacity of any single object to lead us to the macrocosm, helps restore man's true humanitas, Hesiod's awareness that "it is a total placement of man and things among all possibilities of creation, rather than that one alone" (AP, p.33). Man forsakes the spurious grandeur of elevated singularity both in art and everyday life. He inhabits a cosmos whose very substructure is occasions of energy, and he can no longer separate himself from their agitations. We have seen that energy is accorded the scrupulous respect it deserves in the open verse poem, and towards the real concretions, those objects we can see and touch, Olson

61. Duncan, Truth and Life of Myth (New York: House of Books, 1968), p.64.

62. See Duncan's explanation in "A Preface" to Maps, 6 (1974), pp.1-7.

maintains the same "tender care that nothing be lost." It was again in the Mayan people that he found evidence of this disposition operating at all levels. Nothing is disparaged; things are used and re-used, as Olson wrote to Robert Creeley:

You will imagine, knowing my bias toward just such close use of things, how much all these people make sense to me (coca-cola tops are the boys' tiddely-winks; the valves of bicycle tubes, are toy guns; bottles are used and re-used, even sold, as cans are; old tires are the base foot-wear of this whole peninsula (the modern Maya sandal is, rope plus Good-year); light is candle or kerosene... (ML, p.18)

Certainly in North America man had treated objects and resources as readily disposable fodder, lording it over creation and failing to provide means for renewal and recirculation;" About seven years/and you can carry cinders/in your hand for what/America was worth" (ML, p.135), Olson exclaims. The despoilment was that swift after America's inception. His message is unmistakable: if we had first been objects, we would not now stand in peril.

Science's new picture of the world has given us back our rhythms: the flow of energy in which matter consists, the flow of space, and the intensity with which any object radiates its force to our being. In addition, our rediscovered context as object, brings us back to our proper self-existence of breath, and to a recognition that our literal organism is the source of our possibilities. Each of us has what Olson calls a tropos, a particular leaning toward certain things which we will select from the entire phenomenal field. These proclivities are equal to the "flow of feeling" which Olson sees contributing to the process of image. In his "ABC's" we find a most informative syllogism which, Olson tells us, came to him in a dream spoken in the person of Ezra Pound:⁶³

63. Olson, Poetry and Truth, transcribed and ed. George Butterick (San Francisco Four Seasons, 1971), p.64.

Of rhythm is image
 of image is knowing
 of knowing there is
 a construct (AM, p.51)

For Olson, as we have seen, the image or microcosm provides insight into a total construct of reality. But the rhythms out of which image is born are inclusive of matter, space, the singular object, and the body of man. "Not that one alone," man knows and constructs nothing without matter and space as participants. It is the earth, therefore, in her total emplacement in creation, bound and nourished by space, which he would have us admit again to our own life and to the life of the poem. On her depends the slightest act, and it is her laws and flexibility which Olson would put back into art, thereby revivifying those weak forms and devices which man persists in imposing on content:

forms and inventions 'weak' only because
 the size of the substance needed
 for them is, like, say, the
 earth. That is, it takes the earth
 to make a feather fall (AP, p.59).

Olson did put it still more simply, "he who possesses rhythm possesses the universe" (HU, p.10), and where we have lost our eyes, contemporary science gives us proof of those rhythms' actualities and of our own inextricability from the matrix of force.

Chapter Two

The Instant is Extremity - Time as Intense

Man "lost something just about 500 B.C. and only got it back just about 1905 A.D." (SV, p.15). It is again the Socratic school whom Olson cites as responsible for the loss, and Einstein (particularly in his "Special Theory of Relativity"), who restores to us our natural condition. The estrangement in this case, is man's from time, or rather from space-time, the actual world setting in which we live and perceive. We have seen that Olson brings Socrates to task for isolating the time of any individual man from space-time proper, "the common field of reality" as he terms it in Special View (p.27). The Athenian logicians thus rendered man's "space... hollow from the 5th century" (SV, p.27). For Olson this alienation signified the evisceration of creativity; remote from the particularities of resource, there could be but vacant reiteration of static forms. But Einstein's paper of 1905 was to substantiate just how crucial is a man's actual physical setting for any split second.

Prior to Einstein, classical physics¹ had long assumed that space and time were independent of each other, constituting an objective reality which was the same for all men. By the "Special Theory of Relativity" these assumptions were dramatically dissolved. The theory consists of two postulates: that all motion is relative, and that the velocity of light is always constant relative to an observer. By this second postulate Einstein was able to draw certain conclusions about bodies which approach the speed of light, and about time in any moving

1. The transition from "classical" to "modern" physics is generally defined by Planck's discovery of the quantum in 1901. See for example Werner Heisenberg's essay "Recent Changes in the Foundations of Exact Science" in Philosophic Problems of Nuclear Science, trans. F.C. Hayes (London: Faber and Faber, 1952), pp.11-27.

system. The most dramatic ramification of these corollaries has reached the layman: that energy equals mass times the speed of light squared resulted in the explosion of the first atomic bomb in 1945. What Einstein demonstrated was that relative to an observer, a body's mass increases with its velocity, and it follows that as its mass increases its energy will also increase. Accelerated to a velocity approaching the speed of light, the dynamic effects of a body's resultant energy will be tremendous, and as we have witnessed, potentially annihilating.

But the finite velocity of light had implications for our conception of time, as well as the accelerating body. The "time-dilation effect" states that when two observers are moving at a constant velocity relative to each other, it will appear to each that the other's time processes are slowed down. The velocity of light is always constant relative to the observer; that is, regardless of an observer's velocity, the light which he perceives always travels at 186,000 miles a second. With phenomena other than light, velocities are logically additive; a child travelling in a car at 20 miles an hour, throws a ball at 5 miles per hour, and the ball's resultant velocity is 25 miles per hour. The behaviour of light, however, defies logic and remains peculiar to itself. A light ray traversing a plane which is moving at 900 miles per hour, will continue to travel at 186,000 miles per second; the limiting velocity of light cannot be exceeded, and therefore relative to any observer, its speed is always constant. Thus with the two observers moving at a constant velocity relative to each other, the time it takes for each to observe the other's time processes, will be the interval required for light to travel from one to the other. Visual perception is not instantaneous, as the man in the street persists

in believing, and the time taken by light to travel to the observer's eye will make it appear that the time processes of the system moving relatively to him, are slowing down. The absolute time which Newton had supposed in his Scholium, is thus revealed by Einstein's theory to be a delusive convention:

Time had always been considered to be the same for everyone; that is to say, time passed at the same rate for every person or object in the universe. Like a large, slow-flowing river whose current is the same for all points along its banks, time was considered as a uniformly flowing thing which passed at the same rate for everyone. The Special Theory showed that this was not true. It showed that time flowed at different rates for two observers moving relative to each other. 2

In addition, Einstein's theory upturned our habitual notion of simultaneity by demonstrating that for observers at different places, it is a nonenforcable construct:

Suppose I observe the occurrence of two events - A, the emergence of a nova... and B, a lunar eclipse. Seeing them I could tell whether A occurred before, after, or simultaneously with B. I could even measure the time interval between their occurrence by means of a clock. Similarly another observer... looking from his native star Sirius, could also observe the same two events. He too would place them in a time order. Now Newton adopted the common-sense view that the temporal order in which I place the events A and B would be precisely the same as that of... the Sirian observer. Furthermore, my reckoning of the time interval between the occurrence of the two events by means of my watch would be identical with the time reckoning of the Sirian...

Unfortunately this assumption would be valid only if the time at which an event is observed were simultaneous with its occurrence. That would be the case if light travelled, as our ancestors believed, with infinite velocity so that news of any event (the birth of a nova, for example) could be flashed instantaneously everywhere. There would thus be no time lag between its occurrence at one place and its observance from another, however far. We know, however, that this is not the case. Instead of instantaneous propagation of light, we find that light takes millions and billions of years to come to us from some places. When we allow for this time lag between the

2. James A. Coleman, Relativity for the Layman (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), pp.66-67.

occurrence and the observance of an event caused by the finite velocity of light, we find that my reckoning of the time interval between the events A and B is not the same as that of our imaginary Sirian. 3

Einstein's first postulate was that all motion is relative, a truth which many scientists and philosophers had ventured, amongst them Galileo. It was Einstein, however, who carried the principle to its furthest conclusions: we can never speak of absolute motion as such, only of motion relative to something else. There is no omnipotently objective vantage point from which we can judge how bodies are moving relatively one to another; that is, we cannot get outside our own concrete placement in space-time, and anything we observe moves relatively to our own position. All that we can know, therefore, is that a body is moving relatively to something else, as we ourselves move relatively to the earth. The existence of absolute motion becomes as outmoded as Newton's concept of action at a distance in gravitation.

Thus time and motion are seen to be relative to our placement, and as our placement is in space, time and space become so intermingled that we can speak of them as one continuum. "Pure 'localism' of space-time" (HU, p.97), Olson calls it, and elsewhere he states that "the minutest particles are all we can know...;"⁴ these particles are not just particular objects, but our particular co-ordinates in space-time. What we know hinges on where we are located, a simplicity which Socrates overlooked when he removed man from his "common field of reality." We can think of our positioning in space and time as locations at particular intersection points in the world-structure, or space-time continuum. The substantial elements of the world, those

3. Jagit Singh, Modern Cosmology (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), pp.126-27.

4. "Interview with Olson, Duncan, and Creeley," Tish, 21 (September, 1963), p.6.

things which are visible, science calls substantial points. Each of these substantial points at any given moment of time t , will occupy three particular dimensions of space x, y, z . A substantial point will thus coincide with the world-point x, y, z, t . As t continuously varies, there will be a continuous variation of the three space co-ordinates, and the substantial point will describe a world-line within the four-dimensional world. Any phenomenon which we observe involves the intersection of our own world-line and that of the object we perceive, and the point at which they cut through each other is that single instant in which we grasp the material of image. We can visualize a man's life line as embedded in the whole net of meshed world-lines: "The truth (that which holds up) is that the man-line occurs in a universe which is the context of his events - he has no intersection points without the common field of reality in which he is placed..." (SV, p.27).

It is that single point of intersection which should concern us; as Olson puts it, "the only reality that counts... [is] that which is bearing in on us at this instant..."⁵ There is none of Socrates' extraction of man from his contingent and compelling circumstances, nor Plato's deflection of our gaze to the elusive Ideals. "Circumjacence" is that which hurls or impinges around us; vectors make their way to us in the instant and to look away is to come into "a hollow space." Einstein's conclusions that our conceptions of time and motion depend on our co-ordinates in space have since 1905, been repeatedly substantiated by experiment. Relativity is our scientific inheritance, and the consequent value of immediacy gives time new weight. "Projective Verse" does, of course, propagate the necessity of the

5. Olson, unpublished essay entitled "History" quoted by Robert von Hallberg, "Olson, Whitehead, and the Objectivists," Boundary, II, 2 (Fall 73/Winter 74), p.100.

instantaneous grasp, whether of the perceptual act, the reverberation of syllabic weight, or the lead of the expelled breath. "End" or "goal" is thus transformed from some projected ultimate tucked away in a distant future, to the immediately realizable issue of the instant: "END which is never more than this instant, than you on this instant, than you, figuring it out, and acting so. If there is any absolute, it is never more than this one, you, this instant in action" (HU, p.5). "Root person in root place" (MI, p.12) Olson celebrated in the Maximus letters and this was most characteristically his stance toward Gloucester, no greased overview which barely touches, but a steadfast observation from the literal intersection of himself and space-time. Like the statue of "Our Lady of Good Voyage" which overlooks Gloucester Harbour, his gaze is direct and in the poems there are notations which are exact to the facts which he perceives: "the roofs, the old ones, the gentle steep ones/on whose ridge-poles the gulls sit, from which they depart" (MI, p.1).

Again, it is a question of energies, that their directness in the pulsing moment not be lost. The energies include, of course, those of the external world, things as they strike the eye, and man's own perceptual energies, the rapidity by which he manages to absorb what is given. Olson was very much attracted to the lightning-like speed of the nerves in reaction to external phenomena, and refers to the cells of the finger-tips as "very knowing knots in their own rights, little brains (little photo-electric cells,⁶ I think they now call the skin)" (HU, p.9). The "threshold of reception" is "the skin itself, the meeting edge of man and external reality" (HU, p.9); there is a sense of absolute tactility, man's organism open and responsive to the character of that particular "locality" in which he finds himself.

6. It is likely that Olson seized on the notion of the skin as "little photo-electric cells," after reading Norbert Wiener's Cybernetics or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine. In describing the structure of the automata, Wiener states that the machine is equipped with photo-electric cells and other receptors for light, which can duplicate the human ability to absorb and emit messages. It was probably this image of reception at the speed of light which drew Olson's attention, so that he applied it to the human skin itself.

This is the way a bird moves through air or a fish through water: their contact with the medium is pure and unrelieved. Olson would have us develop such a responsiveness to our impinging environment, and the flower tansy, which grew on Cressy's Beach in Gloucester, he gives us as a simple sign of how to begin. The flower's name carries its own concentration of tangibility, and held to the nose, the aromatic odour is so powerful that it can purify the taint of capitalism and "take the smell/of all owners..." (MI, p.9). There is a sharp invasion of the senses as the flower is held close to our face, and it becomes a first lesson in the way the external world touches us if we root ourselves in our immediate circumstance: "o tansy city, root city." The moment is literally of the essence. It is only here that we can know, and to know we must be unfailingly aware. "Indeed it all comes down" Olson asserts, "to a matter of speed. Or what, in this range of 'life' unquote, dubbed human, is called vivid " (SV, p.34).

Through speed of awareness, we gain the vividness or intensity of our surrounding particulars, and in one of Olson's earliest poems, "A Lion upon the Floor" (1946), the total image is that poise of the body in readiness; the crouching lion is the embodiment of potential energy, and once the senses are struck he rebounds and acts with speed approaching that of light. "Lion, spring!" Olson commands in the poem's final line, and it is man whom he cautions to prepare for a like incisive feline reaction to the energies as they present themselves. This poem also carries the urgency that man make of his skin "the meeting place" with external reality, sensitizing the deadened thickness which repels the vectors. Where "power and the abstract" have distracted a man "from his own gain," the cure must be extreme; the flesh and veins are cut open so that he learns anew the advantage of direct contact:

Let the salt in
begin
cut the heart open
the blood will run with sun
the wind will put the belly back
and the rain the roar below (AM, p.2)

Another early poem, "The Story of an Olson, and Bad Thing" (1950), wields a message similar to the later prose piece, "The Resistance." Man's body is at best a fragile force, but it is his root: "This is eternity. This now. This foreshortened span" (HU, p.47), and against the knowledge that death is inevitable, and that Bad Thing persistently devours our organs, we must answer with the fervency of the present act. The "shortness of life" with which the Creator damned us makes us achingly aware of the intense value of any instant, and we resist by confronting its particulars with a like energy. The affirmation, then, is given in blood, that fluid on which depends the continuance of the body's processes. Olson desires that he will die as did his father, by a rupture of the blood vessels, as such a death signifies that each split second of life was met with forcible strength and a completeness of absorption:

... So I live, by
warning, in daily fear I'll not break down by the nerves, as my fellows
do, but by, as he did, the blood vessels, by the breaking of, where
the fragrance is... (AM, p.14)

Many of these early poems, written between 1946 and 1952, carry a similar insistence on the primacy of the reality which we seize in the instant, and the necessity that our perceptual energies be themselves vectors; "This," for example, which makes a bull-fight its setting, not for the purpose of exploiting the existential possibilities, but to illustrate that man's collision with reality is a supremely demanding confrontation. "This," this reality, this now, this intersection of world-lines, requires of man that he complete the circuit, and act on what he sees.

"You/have been/asked" (AM, p.28); the poem's conclusion is heavily weighted, and the demand is not that we act because the world is void of meaning, but because meaning is there to be taken, if our body as instrument is equal to the task. Similarly "Adamo Me," whose title means taking pleasure through oneself, instructs us that there is no reason for "both beauty AND/eternity" (AM, p.25). In the midst of the crashing water which is change, we can ourselves make the moment a "shining monstrance" (AM, p.25). We glimpse beauty as we make our energies equal to the present occasion, and this is sufficient. Again, the "measurable quantum" of time, "say 1/10th of a second" (AP, p.10) is all we know, and the image we make from that quantum is truth. In "The Morning News" (1950) Olson opposes the potency of instantaneous perception (born of blood) to the traditional static forms of American literature. Henry James's "golden bowl" is smashed in the poem's prelude, and in the first section he mocks the pseudo-Freudian leanings of the psychoanalytical school of criticism. F. Scott Fitzgerald's Gatsby "Lover, gold-hatted, high-bouncing lover" (AM, p.111) goes down as well, as does Pound, who deserted his root, and "sped, red-hot, over the seas,/put a belt around the earth..." All these modes, Olson asserts, are defunct; not even Pound has grasped that ultimate truth of energy and instant, caught as he was in his preference for the "Renaissance box" (MII, p.23). Their blood does not pulse: "for look! look! where the blood/has ceased to run/in the collapsed veins!" (AM, p.110). Olson inserts a personal anecdote into the poem, which is indicative of his own immediate involvement in the circulating energies. Spring as a force cannot be denied, and the cathexis is not the spurious one of the Freudian critics, but an actual intermingling of his energies with the environment, as it reaches for his organism:

I remember the day. It was not too many years ago. Spring was on me so (it was a Sunday afternoon, April, perhaps) that I persisted, when my friends insisted, that I come inside and be present while they entertained their girls at cocktails, I persisted in the sun and sat long alone in the grass.

But here is the point. When I did come in I was so caught up in the afflatus of that season

Aprille with her arrowes sweete

that I sat plump down between the two ladies, and took them both in my arms (AM, p.110).

To remind us of the extent to which the logical, distracted man has lost his grip on primordial instancy, Olson gives us in "The Laughing Ones" a portrait of an extreme, a primitive people whose inclination runs to the most violent expression possible of their energies. They are "chillun of the sun" (AM, p.39) and their basic leaning is heliotropism, one of man's first stages in the growth of consciousness. They are a primal people, therefore, best described in their vivacity as "quick," for it is truly uninhibited movement which gives them their character; they "want to dance, only to dance/& slay." As a race, they have not yet achieved the self-awareness requisite for the image-making process and the philosophy of use. Totally immersed in the swirl of power they sense the world to be, they run with their women and slay small game. It is a transitional period in man's development, and although they are "empty-heads," the spontaneity of their laughter and the free turning of their bodies in response to a world-force they intuit, are capacities we must, at least partially, regain. In "The Lordly and Isolate Satyrs" written six years later, Olson illustrates another mode of man's interaction with environmental power. The motorcycle club which enters suddenly the left side of the beach, makes that side apparent to the lesser mortals who had been lounging oblivious. "We saw twice as much. Every-/thing opened..." (AM, p.162) Olson asserts, and the potency each of the club members brings with him is satyric, a libidinal force they have plucked direct

from the ground they cover. But where the energies "the laughing ones" take up are flung free and dispersed, the "isolate saytrs" gather theirs in a dense self-containment. Olson is struck by their "monumental solidity;" they have absorbed the power of the earth, and in so doing, have taken on mythic dimension. They plant their bodies, both on literal ground and on their motorcycles, as fixtures of the environment. Unlike the scattering waste of the "laughing ones," "they wear down nothing as they go;" they have an awareness of their organisms as isolate, yet sustained by the space they traverse. Their bodies bear a quiescent energy, and in the very way they stand or sit, they illuminate the landscape:

We look at them, and begin to know. We begin to see who they are. We see why they are satyrs, and why one half of the beach was unknown to us. And now that it is known, now that the beach goes all the way to the headland we thought we were huddling ourselves up against, it turns out it is the same. It is beach. The Visitors-Resters- who, by being there, made manifest what we had not known - that the beach fronted wholly to the sea - have only done that, completed the beach (AM, p.163).

"What happens now, creates," Olson asserts in his Special View of History (p.42), and in "As the Dead Prey Upon Us" he pictures the restlessness of those dead souls who have let the instants of their lives slide through their fingers, neither the touch of body nor mind granted to the immediacy which calls them. It is Olson's mother who returns in dream to give him the vision, and he feels acutely the many moments in which he did not reach out to her, thus failing to realize the possibilities her proximity held. She brings with her a throng of people who have similarly failed to give the lived instants their weight. "Disentangle the nets of being!" (AM, p.166) Olson cries out and they return to haunt not because they were caught in a trap of fate, but because they failed to handle properly the nets of their own

lives. The fingers (or the more encompassing prehension of the mind) must feel each knotted instant carefully; it is a flame, and thus cannot be deliberately manipulated, but if the organism is responsive, the two will burn in an intensity which is not consumption. Both Olson and his mother had failed in those instants in which they found themselves proximate, relegating their coming together to some nebulous future time, the damnation which is a belief in "eternity:"

The death in life (death itself)
is endless, eternity
is the false cause

The knot is other wise, each topological corner
presents itself, and no sword
cuts it, each knot is itself its fire

each knot of which the net is made
is for the hands to untake
and knot's making. And touch alone

can turn the knot into its own flame

(o mother, if you had once touched me

o mother, if I had once touched you) (AM, pp. 169-70)

"This is eternity. This now. This foreshortened span," Olson had stressed in "The Resistance" (HU, p.47), affirming the potential of the reality immediately tangent to the skin. Where the net runs greased through our hands, we will come in death to a distraught craving. But by entering the flame Olson assures us, we gain the peace-in-death of a satisfied soul:

O souls, burn
alive, burn now

that you may forever
have peace, have

what you crave

O souls,
go into everything,
let not one knot pass
through your fingers

let not any they tell you
 you must sleep as the net
 comes through your authentic hands

What passes
 is what is, what shall be, what has
 been, what hell and heaven is
 is earth to be rent, to shoot you
 through the screen of flame which each knot
 hides as all knots are a wall ready
 to be shot open by you

the nets of being
 are only eternal if you sleep as your hands
 ought to be busy. Method, method

I too call on you to come
 to the aid of all men, to women most
 who know most, to woman to tell
 men to awake. Awake, men,
 awake (p.171).

Olson's zeal for the instant, manifested particularly in the poetry and prose in the period 1950-53, is more understandable given the social context. Obviously his urge to exactitude and the integrity of the expressive etymological root owes much to Pound's influence, the precise scientific method presented in How to Read and ABC of Reading. But where Pound in 1934 saw the daily abuse of words in popular journalism, Olson in 1950 had to contend with the rampant growth of the media and the concomitant burgeoning of the advertising industry. "The Songs of Maximus" (1953) open with his chafing at the invasion by words geared to make us buy, a language prostituted:

colored pictures
 of all things to eat: dirty
 postcards
 And words, words, words
 all over everything
 No eyes or ears left
 to do their own doings (all
 invaded, appropriated, outraged, all senses
 including the mind, that worker on what is (MI, p.13)

But the pervasiveness of advertising signified for Olson much more than the abuse of language. The early 1950's saw the rise to prominence of air travel: magazine advertisements touted the untold benefits of speeding across continents, and they used their ploys particularly upon the businessman. It was an era which capitalized on exploitation of supposedly inexhaustible resource. The following "TransCanada Airlines" advertisement from Time magazine of July 10, 1950 is typical of the popular media's verbal and psychic abuses. This advertisement was in wide circulation just a few months prior to the publication of "Projective Verse," and the writing of "Human Universe:"

It's up to business men to give Canadians socks - and a whole lot more besides. They should do this now, in person! - by flying to Canada and selling their merchandise on the spot, in the very heart of the great hard-currency market.

For Pound, literature has ultimately a social function. The concentric rings of order celebrated in the "Kung Canto" - Canto XIII, radiate from the pure heart, the internal order of the man who uses words precisely. For Olson, internal ordering was rather the result of the respectful disposition toward primordial energies, and he believed such a stance would facilitate the generation of the image exact to object. Olson diverges from the teachings of Pound most dramatically in his valuation of physical matter. While Pound did, of course, acknowledge the process of nature, at least as explained by Confucius, he very definitely subordinated content to form. In a sense he hugged to the Platonic Ideal; it was to kalon that he sought through the diverse materials of the Cantos. The immediate concrete realization was insufficient: "that the body of light come forth/ from the body of fire" (Canto XC1), but it is that intensity of heat which is for Olson the totality, form inextricable from content in the

single impinging instant. The fervour for instantaneous perception is thus perhaps a manifestation of Olson's struggle with Pound's dogma, to which he owed so many of his basic poetic tenets.

In addition, Olson objected to Pound's imposition of intellectual strictures: the "great" books, and the "great" rulers of the Italian Renaissance. He maintained that the historical material of the Cantos was of no use to contemporary North Americans, whose despoilment of resource was the cardinal flow in the process of physis. Where Pound, like the Euclidean geometers, would impose the measure of an external rigidity, Olson drew each man's attention to his rooting in self, prompting him to a recognition of his unique breath-force and his idiosyncratic disposition. In the text of The Secret of the Golden Flower, which both Pound and Olson studied, the Chinese character for self is ho, written with the sign for "energy" inside an "enclosure."⁷ In this way Olson conceived the organism of any man: his poetics aim at democratization. By the discovery of our own disposition, we bend toward certain things in the phenomenal field, and in the unique condition of the instant, human energy transmutes phenomenal energy resulting in the "act" which is form. Olson's fervent appreciation of material, organic and inorganic, made the least vibrations of energy intensely valuable; the "Special Theory of Relativity" validated this sense of the priority of a man's immediate condition, which he continued to cherish in opposition to Pound's disembodied forms. Thus Olson's propaganda has at base an ethical motivation, and its furthest ramifications reconstitute what we have ordinarily considered to be truth.

"The instant, therefore. Is its own interpretation, as dream is..."
(AP, p.39). Given the structure of the relative, each second in which

7. See Richard Wilhelm, trans., The Secret of the Golden Flower (1931; rpt. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), p.32.

we perceive is its own truth. As we should bring to dream no rigid extrinsic definitions but allow meaning to unfold from the dream-content as our own body and mind inform it, so the perceptual instant our mind and body meet brings with it its own relevance. We stand at a single intersection of two world-lines, and there must be no draining of that vividness by either preconceptions or absolutes. "The absolute" Olson clarifies, "... is in fact the way the absolute energy asserts itself" (SV, p.27), and thus the absolute energy of both man's receptors, and of the impinging world, meet and interpenetrate in an instantaneously absolute truth. Both in Special View and "Letter to Elaine Feinstein" Olson stresses how many primitive peoples, including the Trobriand Islanders and the Hopi Indians, have incorporated this awareness into their grammars. They are free of our conceptual strictures of time because their observation of reality is direct. It is particularly the Hopi vision of inseparable time and space which attracts Olson, and he draws heavily on Benjamin Lee Whorf's linguistic analysis of the Hopi grammatical categories.

Whorf conceives the conventional metaphysic underlying our own language and culture as comprising "two grand cosmic forms;" these are the constructs of space and time as we habitually envisioned them, unenlightened by Einstein's cogent instruction: "static three-dimensional infinite space and kinetic one-dimensional uniformly and perpetually flowing time - two utterly separate and unconnected aspects of reality."⁸ The grand cosmic forms of the Hopi, on the other hand, we can see as closely related to Whitehead's "philosophy of organism." The emphasis is on the actual dynamic of process, the organism in the activity of participant prehension, or the resultant creature which is

8. Benjamin Lee Whorf, "An American Indian Model of the Universe," in Language, Thought, and Reality (Boston: M.I.T. Press, 1956), p.59.

now objectively immortal, and the Hopi world thus becomes structured on forms which Whorf calls "the Manifested" and "the Manifesting." The Manifested or "the objective" he describes as comprising all that has been or is accessible to the senses, "the historical physical universe, in fact, with no attempt to distinguish between present and past, but excluding everything we call future." The Manifesting or "the subjective" comprises all that we call future but in addition, that which we call "mental--everything that appears or exists in the mind, or as the Hopi would prefer to say, in the HEART, not only in the heart of man, but in the heart of animals, plants, and things, and behind and within all the forms and appearances of nature in the heart of nature..."⁹

We are reminded in this view of "the subjective" as the burgeoning heart of things, of Whitehead's description of the self-creative urge of the universe, and the subjective aim of any actual entity driving toward the satisfaction of self-realization. "We awake to find ourselves engaged in process..."¹⁰ Whitehead asserts, and in their conception of the world as encompassing the objectively immortal data of past and present, and the living creatures in their process of self-creation, the Hopi carry a picture of the world which is truly "natural" (SV, p.23). Indeed, Whitehead describes the genetic development of an actual entity as occupying a quantum of time; that is, a wholeness of physical time in which there is neither temporal succession nor arbitrary internal divisions. This quantum corresponds to the total compass of the Hopi's "Manifest" and "Manifesting" schema:

9. Whorf, p.59.

10. Adventures in Ideas, p.58.

The actual entity is the enjoyment of a certain quantum of physical time. But the genetic process is not the temporal succession. Each phase in the genetic process presupposes the entire quantum, and so does each feeling in each phase. The subjective unity dominating the process forbids the division of that extensive quantum which originates with the primary phase of the subjective aim. 11

But this quantum of time includes space as well, and we are again confronted by Einstein's notion of the space-time continuum rooted in the very nature of things: "There is a spatial element in the quantum as well as a temporal element. Thus the quantum is an extensive region. This region is the determinate basis which the concrescence presupposes."¹¹ And it is exactly in this way that the Hopi grasp the "natural." As Olson demonstrates it for Elaine Feinstein, "The Hopi say what goes on over there isn't happening here therefore it isn't the same" (HU, p.97), and Whorf had himself emphasized their distinction between "this place" and "this time", and "that place" and "that time."¹² "Localism" of space-time Olson calls it, and the metaphysic of process underlying Hopi culture allowed them to prefigure Einstein's postulates by a primordial directness. What we see cannot be abstracted from those co-ordinates of space-time at which we perceive, but as Olson continuously emphasized, "discourse is still the trammel most of us are caught in and hindered by" (SV, p.24), and the truth of local perception is thus slow to dawn on us.

Such a radicalized view will inevitably change our grammar, just as the Hopi language bears the marks of their world vision. Speech should now become expressive of the placement of our selves, as perception is itself a result of our positioning. We bear our own "sentence" as we move: "There is a grammar. There is a sentence you

11. Process and Reality, p.334.

12. Whorf, p.63.

do have... You are not free than otherwise to perceive" (AP, p.55).

This compounding of man and place Olson saw evidenced in another North American Indian tongue, Yana, as it had been analyzed by Edward Sapir. In Yana, Sapir pointed out, "the local relation is nominalized,"¹³ largely because it is independently conceived. Now that we are aware of the crucial importance of place or locality to the reality which we grasp, the parts of speech by which English generally indicates man's relation to place, namely prepositions, reveal themselves as a particularly weak form, largely unequal to the task of illustrating the bonding of man and locality which gives us truth. The absolute uniqueness of each position and the consequences to which it leads, make it deserving of noun status. Sapir illustrates that although we can nominalize local relations in English, stating for example, "he scrutinized the glass-interior" rather than "he looked into the glass," such expressions sound stilted to us, and in drawing our attention to Yana nominalization, Olson impresses on us the necessity that we restructure our conception of reality (our total grammar); he does not, in fact, suggest that we can transpose the actual constructs of Yana grammar into English. But in showing us how deeply the significance of locality is built into certain language of primitive peoples, he demonstrates conversely, that the demarcations of our own culture have obscured our vision of that which is truly happening.

Within the context of his own poetics, Olson persistently questioned the validity of traditional sentence-structure. "What is the sentence?" (HU, p.95) he had challenged Elaine Feinstein, and in the concentration on the instant it becomes for Olson more and more analogous to the interjection, a terse phrase as compact as the immediacy he has only just caught. It is singularly Fenollosa's definition of the sentence

13. Edward Sapir, Language (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1921), p.125.

as "first act of nature," or transference of force, which informs Olson's poetry. Wherever he succeeds in propelling energy to the reader, syntactic wholeness is accomplished. In "The Librarian" (1956), for example, he includes a vertical column of juxtaposed images, each in sentence-form; although they would classically be considered syntactic fragments, by their proximity and concise eidetic portrayal, they make up an energizing chain. The third fragment contains the participle "dogging," Olson's sole concession to the verbal function of the sentence, yet since the transferal of force is successful, Fenollosa's definition is satisfied:

Black space,
old fish-house.
Motions
of ghosts.
I,
dogging
his steps (AM, p.189).

"On first Looking out through Juan de la Cosa's Eyes," an early Maximus poem (1953), employed such fragmentation to a still greater degree. It crosscuts the first explorations of Columbus, including his tribulations with the teredo worm which could pierce a ship's hull "like a beehive," with quotations from the more contemporary journal of the Gloucester navigator, Nathaniel Bowditch. One of the poem's themes is the risk of death at sea, and Olson notes that in the history of Gloucester 4,670 fishermen so lost their lives. Towards the poem's conclusion, he initiates a kind of stuttering lament, each phrase left incomplete, and it is, in fact, the terminal silences which convey the agony of loss. For Olson, the sentence is significantly any vector which he has himself plucked from the immediate circumjacence, whether his actual physical surrounding, or his total response to the living context of primary document:

No worms. Storms,
Ladies &

to the bottom of the,

husbands, & wives,

little children lost their (MI, p.80)

Olson includes Sapir's "local relations are nominalized," in a highly condensed footnote to one of the Maximus letters, entitled "John Burke." Burke was a councillor in Gloucester city government, who had long been the adversary of Councillor and ex-mayor, Benjamin E. Smith. When Smith retired Burke refused both to sign the complimentary scroll presented to the ex-mayor, and to stand with his fellow councillors as a mark of tribute. Olson seized on this incident, which took place in 1958 and inspired the writing of the poem in the same year, as exemplification of reality perceived by placement. Burke's conception of Smith's achievements was totally opposed to that of his fellow councilmen, and Olson summarizes his isolation:

in matters of the soul a private man
lives torn
by inspectio
and judicium ... (MI, p.142)

Inspectio and judicium, as George Butterick has pointed out,¹⁴ are terms drawn from Descartes' second and third Meditations, which Whitehead discusses in Process and Reality (p.63), the source from which Olson took them. The inspectio or visual perception of the individual man is followed by a judicium, his conceptual decision about what he has seen. By his consistent integrity, John Burke's judicium on Councillor Smith results in his standing alone. "I am

14. George Butterick, "An Annotated Guide to the Maximus Poems of Charles Olson," Diss. University of Buffalo, 1970, p.139. The background of the Burke incident is also taken from Butterick.

no hypocrite," Olson quotes him in the poem, and Burke's personal conception is a product largely of placement and of tropos, his individual inclinations which lead him to hold values for Gloucester diverging radically from those of Smith and the other councillors. Olson enlarges on neither the nature of the antagonism nor the issues at contention. Burke did nominalize his local relations, translating the truth he had perceived of Smith, both by placement and by tropos, into concrete action. But we can, of course, think of the poem as evidence of Olson's own space-time co-ordinates in Gloucester, a vantage point which in January, 1958 resulted in his rounded treatment of the Burke incident. "I, as Maximus," he identifies himself in the poem's footnote, citing the topological "as a prime and libidinal/character of a man..." As Burke's positioning in Gloucester fosters both his conception of the city and of Smith, so in the Letters local relations are nominalized, and Olson in the figure of Maximus, directs his gaze and then speaks the truth.

In the footnote Olson makes play on "topological" in order to illustrate that the truth as judged by an individual man is not damagingly exclusive. It is definitely not a question of each of us perceiving with eyes so different that communication becomes impossible, and Olson again resorts to the mathematical concept of topological mapping to demonstrate this. A truth born of our particular co-ordinates in space-time can nevertheless be followed one-to-one by any other man. "Metric then is mapping...;" our individual measure of John Burke's statement, or of Olson's on Burke, is simply a matter of our following it, or transforming it, into our own frame of reference. We each have our own particular co-ordinates and "tropos," and the truth as presented by another we can map carefully until we achieve a

topological structure emergent from our own "localism." It is thus Olson stresses, the "congruent means of making a statement..." and we will recall that the Euclidean definition of congruence centred on the space a body fills in any two of its positions. The principle of measure required a discontinuous jump, and it is possibly in this way that we have habitually conceived the differing statements of two men about the same reality; they were two disjunct rigid bodies, super-imposable only by a supreme imaginative feat. The new topological congruence, however, does not posit such a separation. The transformation is continuous, and aware again that man has "a common field of reality;" and that what he sees is largely dependent on his co-ordinates in that field, we can map any man's truth into our own co-ordinate system. The two visions are revealed as not so far distant; it is rather, the same body viewed in various of its fluid transformations, each valid for the man who grasped its immediacy from his own unique position. Olson gives Elaine Feinstein a similar assurance that our personal conceptions (what is made ontogenetically, or by the self) will yield phylogenetically; that is, the truth we perceive peculiar to ourselves will transcend mere personal application, and bear relevance for mankind as a whole. In other words, the image we make illuminates the greater construct. Olson does introduce one very important qualification to this onto-phylo development in the Feinstein letter. It is the insistence on the completed circuit which we met first in "Human Universe:" "... if tested by one's own experience" Olson clarifies, "(out plus in) ought to yield along this phylo-line..." (HU, p.97). The energies of the immediately impinging reality must be absorbed by the senses direct, without the least loss of force, then transferred outward once again, transformed but undiminished in terms of energy potential. It is a maintenance, therefore, of "a

tender care" toward the energies with which we work. We can assume that John Burke engaged his surrounding reality in this way, registering each new immediacy as it presented itself. "The instant is extremity" Olson states in Special View (p.36), and at any split second, either he or John Burke might redefine the limits of their world construct, conscious that the quantum of time can unmake and redo those prior judgements which we carry as the data of our self-realization.

In "A Later Note on Letter #15" Olson applies Whitehead's terminology to his certitude that any man's judicium has validity as truth.¹⁵ He opposes "the lie" of the objective, "the latest finest tape-recorder, or any form of record on the spot" (MII, p.79) to the truth of the individual dream, the dream being "what we know went on;" the confrontation of our body with external reality. What "live" television records is not necessarily what we see, our living organisms being the probing instrument. The "dream" we make, therefore, consists in that judgement immediately following on perception, and as Olson makes clear by a double negative, "... no event/is not penetrated, in intersection or collision with, an eternal/event." In Process and Reality Whitehead defines the "eternal events" as "pure potentials for the specific determination of fact" or "forms of definiteness" (p.26). The "self-action" which arises from the single intersection of two world-lines, man's making of image or dream, inevitably crystallizes in truth.

Our truth originates "in place;" imprinted on the mind by those

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15. The essential precondition for Olson's conviction is, of course, the immaculate transposition of phenomenal energies. Misuse, whether partial exploitation or total destruction, nullifies the judicium-truth equation as Olson defines it. A Hitler's interpretatio mundi, therefore, would be inadmissible in Olson's terms, since it is based on egocentrism and the expendability of primal force.

perceptibles which logicity glosses over: things and events.

"Substantive and narrative physicality" (AP, p.50), Olson terms it for Charles Doria, and in "Letter to Elaine Feinstein," he insists on the two aspects of image as "proper noun" and "landscape." "You wld already know I'm buggy on say the Proper Noun" (HU, p.97), he remarks, and the capitalization is indicative of the primacy of self-existence in any concrete object. But in addition to objects, we perceive action in the world, and in order to reveal "event" as the singular concretion it is, he includes all we normally call "narrative" "scene; event; climax; crisis; hero; development; posture" under the noun "landscape." The stress on event or a hero's activity as a comprehensible substantive, much like one of Whitehead's organisms, centres our attention on the wholeness, or quantum, of that activity. It is again his attempt to make our absorption complete within that split second we perceive.

"Only to space-time coincidence and immediate space-time proximity, can we assign an intuitively evident meaning."¹⁶ Again it is Hermann Weyl whom Olson quotes in Special View (p.49), and the emphasis on coincidence in space-time impresses on us the idea of limitation; that is, we can know reality (grasp an intuitively evident meaning) only if we are there, coincident with and proximate to what is happening. But it is obvious that these co-ordinates which limit us to a particular visual field, also provide us with the material of creativity. Whitehead has described the dual nature of the data his actual entities prehend: "The datum both limits and supplies. It follows from this doctrine that the character of an organism depends on that of the environment..."¹⁷ By extension, our own process of image-making and resultant world-view,

16. Weyl, p.95.

17. Process and Reality, p.131.

will depend upon the circumstances which happen to be contingent to our organism. But such limitation is source for productivity rather than despair, as Robert Creeley has pointed out:

I was ... slow in realizing the nature of Olson's proposal that "Limits/are what any of us/are inside of," just that I had taken such "limits" to be a frustration of possibilities rather than the literal possibilities they in fact must invoke. 18

The "limits" which each of us are inside will, of course, include our innate disposition or tropos, and the physical lineaments and cavity of our body itself: the depth or shallowness of our breath, for example. Coupled with the realities we touch at each instant of our lives, Olson sees all these factors as "the given," and it is in terms of such natural, and yet potentially productive, limits that we should now conceive the old term "fate." Like Whitehead's organisms which prehend their data in an urge to self-creativity, we must apply our mind and energies to the reality our skin happens to meet: "... how make ourselves fit instruments for use (how we augment the given - what used to be called fate)" (AP, p.39).

In Special View Olson stresses particularly the image of man's time as "at once center and circumference" (p.36). That single quantum of time which man absorbs to himself, if properly handled by the instruments of body and mind, is returned to the world as the utmost extent of absolute truth. The intersection of a man's world-line with another Olson calls "the double axis of coincidence in space-time" (SV, p.36), and as we have seen, such coincidence defines the possibilities of creation. "Any split second is however long it takes for the relevance of that second to have issue..." (SV, p.36), Olson asserts, and the

18. A Sense of Measure, p.65.

issue will plot man's circumference; the image he makes of that material will illuminate an entire imago mundi. In "Maximus to Gloucester - Letter 14" Olson included the figure of the medieval Adam, standing erect, arms and legs outstretched so that his fingers and toes were tangent to the inner boundary of the globe. So man's mind and body, fixed vertically at actual space-time co-ordinates, can stretch through the slightest quantum of time to the outermost limits of reality we can define:

The old charts
are not so wrong
which added Adam
to the world's directions

which showed any of us
the center of a circle
our fingers
and our toes describe (MI, p.60)

Given the ground of relativity which space-time coincidence and proximity established, it becomes apparent that absolutes, the Beauty, the Good, the Truth, have no place in the structure of creation. We have seen that a man's truth or self-action will be largely dependent on his local relation, and Olson's bold assertion in Special View, "Truth is only a true thought... It ain't at all absolute" (p.40), owes much as well to the revelation that energy is equivalent to matter, and process to actuality. In Process and Reality Whitehead defines the universe as "a creative advance into novelty" (p.260). "The alternative to this doctrine," he states "is a static morphological universe," (p.260), and it is the static ideals of the Socratic school which still intrude on our thinking. As Olson points out, the only way in which we can now conceive the absolute is to study the manner in which absolute energy asserts itself, and that assertion will, of course, occupy a quantum of time perhaps one-tenth of a second. The

continual prehensions of Whitehead's actual entities, their ingressions, interpenetrations, and collisions, give us a picture of a highly participant universe. We will recall Whitehead's ontological principle that each actual entity is in potency everywhere. As human beings, therefore, we operate in a world where not only time and motion are relative according to our position in space, but the very substructure of matter is a persistent engagement in interactive advance. Whitehead warns us that "the essential connectedness of things can never be safely omitted. This is the doctrine of the thoroughgoing relativity of the universe."¹⁹

In his "philosophy of organism," Whitehead takes great care to show us that an actual entity is both subject and superject; that is, it presides over its own creation and in addition, provides the datum for the creativity of others. The character of any individual entity, therefore, is relative by nature:

To be actual must mean that all actual things are alike objects, enjoying objective immortality in fashioning creative actions; and that all actual things are subjects, each prehending the universe from which it arises. The creative action is the universe always becoming one in a particular unity of self-experience, and thereby adding to the multiplicity which is the universe as many. ²⁰

The vector transferences which make up our world are continuous; actuality is process by definition, and the universe becomes one with each instantaneous self-realization of a single entity. The goal is not achievement of a perfected universe at the end of the cosmic line, but the self-realization of the instant, in which the universe itself engages. Thus in Special View Olson draws our attention to Whitehead's

19. Adventures in Ideas, p.197.

20. Process and Reality, pp.71-72.

analysis of "the Consequent as the relative of relatives..." (p.16). There can be no static terminal point, or as Olson explains later in the book, "purpose is seen to be contingent not primordial" (p.49). For both Olson and Whitehead, there is no omnipotent God at the beginning of Creation, gloating over an infallible and eternally determinant plan for the universe. Whitehead does see God as possessing a primordial nature, but His outlook is prospective; He is characterized by His own immediate appetite for self-creation, and His "consequent" being "evolves in its relationship to the evolving world."²¹ Keeping in mind Olson's conviction that it is above all speed of receptivity or vividness on which man should concentrate, we find Whitehead in Process and Reality attributing such an obsession with the immediate to God: "The primordial appetites which jointly constitute God's purpose are seeking intensity, and not preservation" (p.125). "All things are vectors" Olson quoted Whitehead in the initial lectures for Special View,²² and the transition from self-realizing subject to objectively immortal datum within the split second, characterizes God Himself. Two years prior to his initial introduction to Whitehead in Adventures of Ideas, Olson had had such a vision of God's intense and immediately self-creative nature. He had had the wisdom, in addition, to turn his back, so that both he and God could move toward a new self-creation:

I have known the face
of God.
And turned away,
turned,
as He did,
his backside (MI, p.88)

Three years later in Special View he puts it more simply still, "I think God is merely the act of taking thought. I take it that's what

21. Process and Reality, p.16.

22. "Lecture Black Mountain, 1956" in Olson/Melville, p.84.

one means by the creation of the universe" (pp.39-40). As Whitehead sees God evolving with His own creation, so Olson sees Him manifested in the single thought of man. Our self-creativity consists in thought and action; the image we make is, in fact, the universe as one. In the instant that we take up and return energies, we form a comprehensive view of the world which has just touched us. Our capture of intensity defines God as present, and the wholeness of the circuit of energies posits His unity as much as it does that of the universe itself. As God wars Himself against a perfect static nature, so Olson cautions us that perfection once achieved is already imperfect by the fact that "it has pushed the limit of possibility..." (SV, p.29). To rest content with any realized form or image is to deny the nature of the universe.

As a poet, the problem of Beauty continued to concern Olson, and we have already noted that the early poem "Adamo Me..." denies the necessity that there be both Beauty and eternity. Taking up the statement which Found in the Pisan Cantos attributed to the dying Aubrey Beardsley, "Beauty is so [most] difficult,"²³ Olson demonstrates that the difficulty lies not in capturing Beauty, the ideal and permanent Form, but in readying the body for the instantaneous grasp before she moves on. At "her tips, not, NOT/to be dum-dummed..." (AM, p.21), Olson instructs us and the prose is necessarily child-like, we have fallen so far from the simplicity that Beauty cannot be permanently encircled. Like God, she is glimpsed in the instant, and immediately streams away, receding from that perfection which has defined new possibility. Olson visualizes himself maintaining the poised and responsive stance, in the midst of ocean's crashing waves. It is a most exacting task,

23. Pound, Cantos LXXIV and LXXX.

attempting to catch at Beauty or God (Christ the Fish) in a watery confusion. "And with only the hands," he emphasizes, for it is by the skin we absorb the energies which can make that sudden vision. The difficulty, therefore, is to find the strength to persist in a highly cautious attention, both eye and body ready for the fleeting gleam. That both God and Beauty slip away once we have seized them is no cause for despair; it is, in fact, an affirmation of the universe in process:

beauty, "is most difficult" But
for that reason is, at her tips, not, NOT

to be dum-dummed, you-me, the order of the day is
shall not spread the ends of, with too much teeth, shall
stay in there, without, without, without even

the christ, is a fish, to be caught, especially
where the waves come in, where
(like a wall, they
pour,

and only with the hands

(the absolute
danger of losing, the tow is such, &
below, the drag
of the sands)

can you seize (p.21)

In "The Ring of" (1952) Olson depicts Beauty's child, Cupid, as the living arrow of his mother; he is the manifestation of her vector force, "...the arrow of/as the flight of, the move of/his mother who adorneth" (AM, p.80), and the incompleteness of the prepositional phrases indicates the openness to new possible forms. In the poem Olson explores the mythological wedding of Venus to gods either maimed or destructive, Vulcan the forger, and Mars the god of war. She takes to herself those qualities which will temper and break up any static morphologies human culture may have imposed upon her; "knowing hours, anyway/she did not stay long..." for she is herself aware that she will perish if made an unchanging fixture:

Beauty, and she
 said no to zeus & them all, all were not or
 was it/^{she} chose the ugliest
 to bed with, or was it straight
 and to expiate the nature of beauty, was it? (p.80).

Not to expiate her nature as Olson well knows, but to ensure her continued live force, Beauty must consistently break up her own orders. Although he suggests in Special View that she is a "permanent of creation" (p.39), she is in no sense a permanent Ideal; she is rather a constant, whom man may seize at any of several instants in his own life's time.

As Beauty, God, and Truth can no longer be considered static absolutes, so the meaning of "history" itself must be re-examined, and the fact that Olson entitles his lectures The Special View, indicates just how much his own definition owes to Einstein's "Special Theory of Relativity." Although he is still estranged from the fact, man should now become increasingly aware that perception, and consequently the truth he makes for himself, hinge on placement. All that we can know is contained within the instant, and as we know from Whitehead's "philosophy of organism," the objectively immortal data of the "past" can be actively engaged in the self-realization of the immediate present. The "Special Theory of Relativity" does dispel the Newtonian stream of absolute time, and the belief that history comprises what man has done is seen to be inconsistent with the world picture Einstein has given us. For Olson, therefore, history becomes inseparable from the active, from what man does at this point in time. "I do not hypostatize the concept of history," he explains in Special View "but employ it as a concept denoting intensity or value" (p.18). The emphasis on "intensity" again recalls vividness, the necessity that we work at the speed the impinging energies demand. The first half of Special View concentrates

on restoring to us this simplicity: "Like it or not... history is the function of any one of us," (p.17), and as Olson later defines "function" as "the proper or characteristic action of anything" (p.18), we become cognizant that our function as human is action. History thus becomes "the new localism" (p.25), equal as it is to the energy man expends in his immediate local relation. Olson also describes history as man's "practice of space in time" (p.27); as he places the stake of his body and directs the strength of his gaze, man does practise space, and such practice if he properly completes the circuit of energies, will lead to act. The shift is to the living man, therefore, and it is for this reason that Olson reverses John Smith's "History is the memory of time" (MI, p.112) to "my memory is/the history of time" (MII, p.86). The responsibility for history belongs to each of us, as we stand vertical, and as we act from our particular placement in space.

Historical fact as a purely objective actuality, having enduring universal application, is replaced by the vision of fact as "the place of the cluster of belief" (SV, p.21). Olson splits the noun so that it becomes "his story" and what each of us believes to be truth, will comprise historical fact. "Cluster" suggests accumulation, and we begin to see that "past" and absolute fact is subject to a growth and development identical with that of Whitehead's organisms. It is self-blinding to accept wholly facts with which others supply us; Olson proved this in his personal study of the origins of human civilization. "The Gate and the Center" (1950) was his initial effort to disseminate the truth that historians and archaeologists have gradually made a cluster, that Sumer and not the Indus Valley civilization, is the root of human culture. The cuneiform script of the Sumerians was the first written language, and it was the Phoenicians who brought an

alphabet to Crete, and hence to Greece. But the discovery that Sumer is the centre comes about through the action of various men, delving into written material and archaeological sites. Archaeology demonstrates perhaps most dramatically how historical fact is in reality a living organism, pushing the limits of possibility with each realization. Even with the more recent history of America, Olson takes pains to investigate for himself; the stature of the American Indian in his "West" series, for example, radically opposes the long traditional line of American history books. "To get the density of what happened," Olson admits in Special View (p.19) is not easy. We have, he suggests, but two ways open to us, and both demand present activity: make it up, or try to find out (p.19). The split between fact and fiction is yet another fallacy perpetrated by Plato and his Receptacle of ideal and absolute Forms. Now that we recognize truth as an incremental growth through belief and discovery, we cannot dismiss "making up" or imagination out of hand. To each experience, a man will bring his own interpretation, born partially of placement and partially of an innate disposition toward certain judgements. In this way all our historical facts have been gathered, and thus Olson scoffs at the "objectivity" of Thucydides, and the school of history his methodology founded. As we saw in "A Later Note on Letter # 15" Olson defines the "objective," "the latest finest tape-recorder, or any form of record on the spot" as a lie, and Robert Creeley posits that "reality is just that which is believed, just as long as it is believed."²⁴ All that we can know, therefore, is the reality we ourselves believe, and what other men tell us that they believe.

To accumulate the stories of others is the Herodotean method.

24. A Sense of Measure, p.11.

Olson defines 'istorin as "to find out for oneself" (SV, p.20), and points to Herodotus as the first and most exemplary practitioner of this method. We see that Olson applies it to himself in the first volume of Maximus; he plunges into the writings of John Smith, for example, his complete Travels and Works and Advertisements for the Unexperienced Planters of New England, quoting at length in the Letters in order to gain some sense of the early settlement of New England as Smith perceived it. In the letter entitled "The Picture," Olson first introduces the incident concerning John Watts, and his investigations of what took place continue into the fifth book of Maximus. Watts was factor of the Dorchester Company which in 1625 set up a fishing settlement at Cape Ann. There the company took over an abandoned fishing stage which had been built the year previous by a group of Plymouth fishermen.²⁵ This usurpation resulted in violent dispute between the two groups, and for this reason the existing reportage on the squabble is hardly of Thucididean "objectivity." It is perhaps because the beliefs of various men are so deeply entrenched in the documentation available, that Olson selects the incident to investigate for himself. The basic frame of reference is straightforward. The Plymouth fishermen who had originally built the stage, kept a supply of salt, shallops, and other provisions for their own use, stored on Ten Pound Island in Gloucester Harbour. They accused John Watts of taking these supplies. Watts, however, claimed that he had been told to do so by Thomas Morton, who had said the salt was in his charge. The Herodotean method and the cluster of belief become most evident in Olson's wording of the available information. It resolves itself in a series of statements, one man on another's, which is truly the means by which we know; "Anyhow

25. See Butterick, "Annotated Guide," p.113.

John Watts took salt/he said Morton said/was his..." (MI, p.115).

"Going Right Out of the Century," written three years later, and included in the fourth book of Maximus consists of Watt's own answer to the charges, in which he declared that he took only salt. Finally, in the fifth book, Olson arrays the facts as he believes them to be, having investigated the incident to the best of his ability:

John Watts took
salt - and shal-
lops, from
the Zouche Phoenix
London's supplies
10 Lb Island (MII, p.106)

Olson does believe that Watts also took shallops, but whether the incident was strictly theft, or was planned provocation, and whether Watts and Morton colluded in a deliberate prevarication, remains mystery. And as Olson points out in Special View "mystery" is the rhyme of "history" (p.20), much of it remaining as uncertain as the consequences of our own acts. The Watts incident may seem negligible in itself but Olson's persistent handling of it, is demonstration of how he himself sought the evidence of what is said. It is significant, in addition, that the incident is not delivered to us in any final fiat stage, but is left open to further discovery. For the Watts incident and all the early history of Cape Ann, Olson must obviously rely on document, and in the early poem "La Preface" (1946), he defined document as such an opening of possibility; the closure of absolute fact, and the abandoning of the dead to flowers, have no relevance for those who realize that any instant may break fact open:

It is not obscure. We are the new born, and there are no flowers.
Document means there are no flowers and no parenthesis(AM, p.43).

We can see that much of Maximus IV, V, VI continues investigation through document: "the winning thing," for example, which speculates on the speciality of William Stevens, known to be the first carpenter to settle in Gloucester, or the poem entitled "Thurs Sept 14th 1961," in which Olson catalogues the first births in Gloucester, all the initial residents, and the boundaries of their respective properties. In the first three books of Maximus Olson had also relied on the personal experience of others in his investigation of past event. "Letter 2" relates how the navigator Nathaniel Bowditch had brought his ship the Eppie Sawyer through stormy waters "spot to her wharf a Christmas morning" (MI, p.7). Olson had apparently heard this story which circulated in Gloucester as illustration of Bowditch's prowess; the facts were based on an account given by a sailor who had been on that voyage, but he had related the circumstances thirty-five years after the event. In "Letter 15" Olson presents not so much a recantation of the substance of "Letter 2," but a further development of the historical facts as his investigations revealed them. George Butterick points out that in reading the definitive biography of Bowditch,²⁶ Olson discovered that the ship involved was, in fact, Putnam, that it was Christmas night and not Christmas morning, and that it was fog and not snow through which Bowditch navigated so skillfully. "It goes to show you," Olson begins his restatement of the facts now known, but what it demonstrates for him is not that the word of mouth should be suspect, but that truth is what is believed in the instant, and that further activity can make that single belief a cluster or constellation. What the old sailor could not recall, "he must have been 85 when he added the rest of the tale" (MI, p.67), he made up, and the facts he makes are consistent with his belief, and with his vision of the man concerned.

26. Butterick, "Annotated Guide," p.62.

"A Later Note on Letter ~~#~~ 15" which comes twelve years after the first reference to the incident, is an endorsement of the old sailor's "dream" or "self-action." What he said of Bowditch was what he believed happened, and by strength of perception in placement, his statement does assume the definiteness of Whitehead's "eternal events."

The main point Olson would have us grasp is that all fact emanates from the mouths of individual men, all of whom were, are, or will be differently disposed. The significance of Olson's introduction of J.A.K. Thomson's analysis of Logos (in its original sense of "story"), and Jane Harrison's interpretation of myth as spoken ritual, is that both centre on the word of mouth. Logos did not originally mean "reason" or "word," but merely "what is said," and "what is said" is a repetition of "what is done." Similarly, Jane Harrison sees myth as "the spoken correlative of the acted rite, the thing done" (SV, p.21). But as Olson makes clear, to speak of what was or is done is all we know; it is the essence of historical fact, and that both story and myth obey an identical principle, indicates just how similar they are. "At no point outside a fiction can one be sure" (SV, p.19), Olson claims, and we can conceive all the statements of men as fictions. Perception is relative to placement; belief and selectivity emerge from one's innate disposition, and no matter how far back we go, we confront the words of men correlative to what they believed they perceived. It is also from Jane Harrison that Olson derives the basic elements of "the syntax of metaphysic" (p.21) demanded by the new historical stance. Myth, she states in Themis "blends the historical and the natural,"²⁷ and she includes in addition, supernatural powers. For Olson the "natural" element of history is best illustrated by the space-time conception of the Hopi Indian, which we previously examined. Their

27. Jane Harrison, Themis (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1927), p.330.

emphasis on "localism" and instantaneous perception, takes into account the actual conditions of human vision and is, therefore, most "natural." The supernatural element in history Olson also calls the "demonic," and draws our attention to Paul Tillich's handling of this force in man's history. Tillich defines the demonic as resting upon "the tension between form-creation and form-destruction,"²⁸ and with this idea of inherent rejection of achieved form or perfection, we are reminded of Whitehead's organisms, achieving satisfaction, becoming immortal, and engaging in other creations.. The "natural" itself is, of course, the very essence of the "philosophy of organism" with its concentration on the intensity of instantaneous energies. "I take it Whitehead has written the metaphysic of the reality we have acquired," Olson writes at the beginning of Special View (p.16), and his own stance toward history as the active and organically developing, owes much to Whitehead's process-actuality equation.

The switch of stance is dramatic, but should be easily achieved if we are aware of "the reality we have acquired." In no sense does history lie remote, fixed, and irrefutable. Our daily acts, the very output of energy, are defined as "historic," and even in finding out "what did happen," we rely more and more on present activity to reveal "truth." We either "make it up," which is much what we do in each instant we perceive, or we find out for ourselves, ransacking the documents which comprise the words of other men. As Olson demonstrates in both volumes of Maximus this Herodotean method is no effete game. His advice to Ed Dorn that the "best thing to do is to dig one thing or place or man until you yourself know more abt that than is possible

28. Paul Tillich, The Interpretation of History, trans. N.A. Rasetski and E.L. Talmy (New York: Scribner's, 1936), p.80.

to any other man" (AP, p.11), he was to follow assiduously himself with regard to Gloucester, Massachusetts.²⁹ It appears as yet another of Olson's simplicities that history is equivalent to "an active." It is what you do now, and the antithesis between the old and new stance he condensed in the poem "At Yorktown:"

At Yorktown the long dead
loosen the earth, heels
sink in, over an abatis
a bird wheels

and time is a shine caught blue
from a martin's
back (AM, p.59)

But the stance to catch the "shine" of time is the one the poet has long practised in the process of image. In "Letter to Elaine Feinstein," it is primarily "the Image" which Olson examines, and although the letter is written three years after the lectures comprising Special View, we find much of the same material and emphases. He leads her both to the Hopi's "localism" of space-time, and the vision of truth as "the thingitself" (HU, p.94), the words compressed in an immediate realization. Like the "active" history, image confines itself to present and potential energies, and as such it is one construct which has retained remnants of Herodotean wisdom. Its creation rests on the individual self, looking and investigating. That you capitalize Image "makes sense," Olson writes to Feinstein: "it is all we had ... as we had a sterile grammar (an insufficient 'sentence') we had analogy only" (HU, p.96). The sterile grammar based on the art of comparison and the pure copula, amounts to a total draining

29. Olson's advice to Ed Dorn illuminates his attitude to William Carlos Williams' handling of Paterson, New Jersey as epic source. He objected to Williams' emotional filtration and the subordination of negative fact - the pollution of the Pasaiic, for example, to his vision of a "blueberry America" (ML, p.30).

of the force of physicality. Analogy, for Olson one of logic's primary anathemas, results in a transference of a body's peculiar energies to another body unlike itself. As he shows us in "Grammar - a book," a condensed guide to the new sentence-form we must evolve, the adjective "like" has its etymological roots in the Anglo-Saxon lic "having the same body or shape" (AP, p.27). It is only in cases of total identity of morphology, therefore, that "like" should be used in comparisons. It is the singularity of instantaneous self-existence which is paramount in both the creation of image, as well as in history, and the introduction of an element extrinsic to that situation, debilitates the source of act. There is no place for generalization or non-specifics in Olson's grammar, and as substantiation he points to the derivation of the indefinite article "a" from the Anglo-Saxon numeral, "one."

The eye of man, as it does manage incisively to strike the "one," is a central image in the first volume of Maximus. One cannot escape the demand of "Our Lady of Good Voyage," for example, who "looks/as the best of my people look/in one direction..." (ML, p.6). Deflection of the gaze is tantamount to the death of creativity, and the perfectly directed focus is celebrated as pure vector force. The eyes of the sea-captain Walter Burke, for example, fix as sharply as a gull's:

... he was that good a professional, his eyes
as a gull's are, or any Portygee's,
and the long visor of his cap more of a beak
than even the same we all wore (p.27)

Vision is the primary way we experience the world of objects external to our flesh, and from the substance of such experiencing we make act. "Polis is/eyes" (p.26) therefore; the city of human organisms posits its productivity in the ability to take up energies wholly, and this directed gaze assures us that there is no progressive scale of being.

It is a matter simply of one-to-one, one object caught up by the eye's vector, one event tangent to the skin:

There are no hierarchies, no infinite, no such many as mass, there are only eyes in all heads,
to be looked out of (p.29)

By the singularity of placement and tropos, our perception is intensely particular to ourselves. Olson thus centres on the root isolation of each of us, the word "isolation" implying, however, no existential loneliness, for we have the contingency on all sides of common human flesh; but just as only the individual can discover his self-defining rhythm or breath, so perception is revealed as intrinsically one man's:

Isolated person in Gloucester, Massachusetts, I, Maximus, address you
you islands
of men and girls (MI, p.12)

For Elaine Feinstein, Olson analyzed this isolated perceptual placement in terms of a triple force: topos/typos/tropos. We have already looked at tropos; Olson states of it in the letter, "'bent' as born and of sd one's own decisions for better or worse (allowing clearly, by Jesus Christ, that you do love or go down)" (HU, p.97). "Bent" is obviously our disposition by birth, that we will by heredity have certain inclinations, and our decisions and judgements be products of these. We do love or go down; like Whitehead's organisms we will react to impinging data with either positive or negative feeling. And in the absence of all positive feeling, we perish for lack of sustenance. Olson told the audience in his lectures Poetry and Truth, that he felt they would find typos the easiest of the terms to grasp (p.42). "The 'blow' hits here," Olson tells Elaine Feinstein and the blow is simply that of object or event, to eye or skin. We can thus think of typos

as strictly equivalent to physicality or self-existence. Topos is place and thereby includes our actual co-ordinates in space-time. Image "carries the trinity via the double to the single form which one makes oneself..." (HU, p.97). The "double" is for Olson, Muse and Psyche, the two phenomenal universes which are our basic condition. Psyche is specifically "the life," the human universe as the Greeks distinguished it in the breath and soul of man. It is possible that Olson takes Muse as "the world" because it is the Muses in Hesiod's Theogony who tell the poet of things that were, are, and shall be, the total scope of the known. Man, or Psyche, finds himself in the world, but his relationship is not tenuous; he has, in fact, a "built in" connection to cosmos, and this link is the triple ply of place, object, and disposition. As he lives, man finds himself at some definite space-time co-ordinates, and in that immediacy of placement, he will be struck by some object or event; he will react to this blow according to his disposition, and by a positive absorption of the energies, will be able to complete the circuit and make image of that imprinted object. As we are aware, Olson believed that the image made by the individual man can transcend idiosyncrasy, and illuminate form or construct of universal relevance. The prerequisite for the onto-phylogenetic development is, of course, the immaculate transposition of energies in and out.

In picking up energies instantaneously and directly, the vision we have of the world is "primitive," "new, fresh, first," as Olson clarified it in the Feinstein letter. It was the condition he sought in unearthing the term "archaic," a word which popular sensibility has rendered perjorative. Things which are "archaic," we normally think of as expendable because outmoded, but it is, in fact, the arche or

"beginning" root, to which Olson would draw our attention. We must again see things as they manifest the freshness of their own creation. Each moment that we responsively confront the actual world, we do engage in creation, perceiving the object in its archaic primacy or essence. In Poetry and Truth Olson referred to the archaic as "an obdurate time or condition" (p.24), and we are compelled to recognize the substantive blow which any object will persist in making. To restore the "archaic" is to bring us to that recognition of contingent energies which we saw in "The Laughing Ones" or "The Lordly and Isolate Satyrs." It is ironic that the oversight which Olson saw as our damnation, the dismissal of the instant in preference for some future promise, is directly refuted by the scientific theory which was to give our age its character. That we look away, Olson never tired of pointing out; infected with the Aristotelian division of substance and quality, what we lose has cosmic ramifications. We take much for granted, blinding ourselves to the very mass of the earth which we inhabit, but as Olson discriminates, even "earth was genet in an order of time" (AP, p.51). Earth did itself come into being; it too had an original freshness or archaic character, which we as pragmatic tenants have tended to overlook. "Maximus, to Gloucester," written in the winter of 1957, puts it most clearly. When we seize the world in an instant, it should be an initiation. We have not been there before, regardless of what logic would have us believe:

He left him naked,
the man said, and
nakedness
is what one means

that all start up
to the eye and soul
as though it had never
happened before (MI, p.107)

The first time in our lives that we make image from a primitive ground of contact, we experience a second birth. Olson explains this in "Ode on Nativity," an early poem which centres on a single incident in his childhood in Worcester, Massachusetts. When he was seven years of age, he witnessed the burning of the Sawyer lumber company yard, a "gross fire" which resulted in the death of the company's horses. But this instant, despite its intense and terrifying heat, demanded an absolute confrontation, and thus the child looked and became aware of the power a second can carry. The initiation is arduous; his inclination is to turn away and avoid the horses' agonies. But in admitting the situation as unavoidably tangent to himself, he accepts the force and reworks it to image, in this instance, the conflagration and obsessive engagement which characterize the immediate reach of external reality to our organism. After this first birth, there will be others, for the child is cognizant of the possibilities each moment presents. There is a compounding of his body with the world, and the product is self-creation, a fresh nativity of world and self in each instance. The key is to mark the grasses themselves, and not the intervals between them, the error of the "old narratives" which supplanted instant by the river of time:

All things now rise, and the cries of men to be born
in ways afresh, aside from the old narratives, away
from intervals too wide to mark the grasses

.....

the grasses in the ice, or Orion's sweep, or
the closeness of turning snows, these
can tell the tale of any one of us stormed or quieted
by our own things, what belong, tenaciously,
to our own selves

Any season, in this fresh time
is off & on to that degree that any of us miss
the vision, lose the instant and decision, the close

which can be nothing more and no thing else
 than that which unborn form you are the content of, which you
 alone can make to shine, throw that like light
 even where the mud was and now there is a surface
 ducks at least, can walk on. And I
 have company
 in the night (AM, p.83)

The image which endows the world with structure is ideally a product
 of two heats, that of the operant reality, and that of the man or child
 whose organism is intensely allowable. It is a conflagration made
 in isolation, a one-to-one experience, and this loneliness cannot be
 shirked:

is there any birth
 any other splendor than
 the brilliance of the going on, the loneliness
 whence all our cries rise? (p.84).

The "Special Theory of Relativity" does grant the instant an
 extremity and intensity it had not had since Socrates. Olson used its
 proof to help him repudiate tradition as rigid measure of our own
 accomplishments; the dead are seducers, anxious to make us drunk from
 the pot of their remote reality. "A Newly Discovered Homeric Hymn"
 cautions us against succumbing. "You have your own place to drink,"
 he concludes, and it is here:

Hail and beware them, in their season. Take care. Prepare
 to receive them, they carry what the living cannot do without,
 but take the proper precautions, do the prescribed things, let
 down the thread from the right shoulder. And from the forehead.
 And listen to what they say, listen to the talk, hear
 every word of it - they are drunk from the pot, they speak
 like no living man may speak, they have seeds in their mouth -
 listen, and beware (AM, p.164)

The words of the dead must be tempered by our own investigation and
 activity. We impose their frame of reference on our living bodies at
 our peril.

It is particularly in the contemplative "Maximus, to himself" that Olson admits the great difficulties attendant on man's rooting himself in a responsive and responsible isolate perception: "that we grow up many/And the single/is not easily/known" (MI, p.52). We must contend vigilantly against the compound vision of society, the generalized tags which banish objects to their various categories, scattering force. Once we do inhabit and respond to singleness, he was convinced, the world becomes characterized by openness and possibility. Where live energy is primary, the next self-realization is always just "around the bend." For this reason, many of Olson's poems have open conclusions: the first Maximus letter, for example, which places the going energy directly into the hands of the reader, and "A Later Note on Letter #15" which asserts that "the poetics of the situation /Whitehead's metaphysic/ are yet to be found out." And Maximus IV, V, VI concludes with a box upon the open sea. No horizons are visible, and the vector movement is onward. The instant as intense, restores to us the organic process of continual self-realization which is the cosmos, and to ignore it, Olson maintains, is to strangle the life-force:

... to assume that there was any way that end could be separated from instant (from any person or object as any more than the exact striking of that person or object directly and presently on you or me) was as threatening an attack on the roots of life... (HU, p.37).

Chapter Three

Man, That Participant Thing

In the Mayan Letters, Olson writes to Robert Creeley of a clay figure he had seen in the Museum at Campeche, a human being rising from the centre of a flower in place of the pistil (ML, p.51), and his excitement over this glyph illuminates his own sense of man's context in a living universe; we are ourselves an organic part of the interchange of energies which Whitehead terms physis or process. In another letter written in Yucatan to Creeley, Olson described man "as object in a field of force declaring self as force..." (ML, p.67), and even the purely agrarian reading of the field image specifies an egalitarian unity, a wholeness emergent from individual and participant forces. The primordial eye grasped this as first fact as we can see in the Mayan working of the man-flower, an object exemplifying the mutual informance of the human and externally phenomenal universes.

In his early essays, Olson's insistence is repeatedly on man as flesh. "The Resistance" fixes on "the house he is, this house that moves, breathes, acts, this house where his life is..." (HU, p.47), and in "Human Universe" he depicts each of us peering out of a delimited organism bounded by skin. Drawing our attention to the fact that we are flesh foremost, Olson stresses both our vulnerability, the frailty of the reed-body, and our openness to the impinging world by way of sensory receptors. He devoted his life to the propagation of what should have been obvious, that "energy is larger than man" (HU, p.22), and thus conceived the human body as instrumentation rather than finite repository. In "The Gate and the Center," Olson had equated "end" with Melville's Ahab, the egotistical structure of man "responsible

only to himself by the exhibition of his energy, AHAB, end" (HU, p.21), opposing this to the Maya's agitated alertness: "It was better to be a bird, as these Maya seem to have been, they kept moving their heads so nervously to stay alive, to keep alerted to what they were surrounded by..." (HU, p.12). The central image of "Human Universe," the skin as meeting-edge of man and his world, implements a vision of the phenomenal universes (human organism and external environment) as a unified whole. This symbiosis is the source of all image and act, and it is the physical body, Olson posits, which is the primary instrumentation.

"Letter 27," withheld until the publication of the second volume of Maximus, is one of Olson's most detailed explorations of the symbiosis. He begins with a highly personal memory of a child-hood summer in Gloucester, a concatenation of events making up his concept of "landscape:" the happenings are concretions, caught up in the instant and carried through life. The physical geography of the land, a baseball game played into the dark of evening, his father's lack of proficiency at golf, and the return home where the child and his father were buoyed by the chatter of the women, are all past occasions which continue to engage the mature man in his living present. Olson's initial memory fixes his mother and father at a moment demonstrative of their own youthful energy and bonding in love. His father "roaring" and his mother "laughing and sure" are images which suffuse Olson's later poetry, and participate in his own formation of a definitive world, and self image. Each of these occasions, although past, is immediately participant in the writing of the poem. "I come back to the geography of it," he begins, and the verb is indicatively present:

I come back to the geography of it,
the land falling off to the left
where my father shot his scabby golf
and the rest of us played baseball

into the summer darkness until no flies
could be seen and we came home
to our various piazzas where the women
buzzed

To the left the land fell to the city,
to the right, it fell to the sea

I was so young my first memory
is of a tent spread to feed lobsters
to Rexall conventioners, and my father,
a man for kicks, came out of the tent roaring
with a bread-knife in his teeth to take care of
a druggist they'd told him had made a pass at
my mother, she laughing, so sure, as round
as her face, Hines pink and apple (MII, p.14)

The poem next presents a challenge to a mute auditor; it is again the Greeks with their entrenched notions of absolute substance and absolute fact, whom Olson assaults in the poem. "This Greeks, is the stopping/ of the battle," he declares, taking his precedent in Robert Graves' description of the Celtic bards who alone were empowered to have a battle stopped so that they might record what they had seen.¹ Their vantage-point was some protected hill-top; Olson's is a personal rooting in space-time outside the preconceptions and assumptions of Greek thought which we have culturally absorbed. He demands a juncture for consideration and it comes suddenly, breaking in on the pastoral flow of child-hood anecdote. The material of the second half of the poem is drawn very largely from Whitehead's Adventures in Ideas, which Olson had read early in 1955. Whitehead was very much involved with epistemology, but just as he envisioned the actual entities of the world engaging one another because of a basic "concern," so he saw the occasion of human knowledge as an affective relation between the knower and the known. "Prehension" is once again a useful image.

1. See Robert Graves, The White Goddess (London: Faber and Faber, 1948), p.22.

In their obsession with separation of the world's objects into categories, the Greeks tended to conceive the external universe as a hierarchy of passive isolates. According to Whitehead, Western awareness of a continuity underlying the world-structure was largely non-existent from the death of Heraclitus until the theoretical revelations of Faraday. Even in terms of the generation of fact, the Greeks overlooked the accumulation of continuous concrete incident which led to the fully articulated idea. Rather, they saw the birth of the personal idea as self-generated, the sudden possession of abstract form, the particulars of which were so demeaned as to be completely forgotten or ignored:

It was the defect of the Greek analysis of generation that it conceived it in terms of the bare incoming of novel abstract form. This ancient analysis failed to grasp the real operations of the antecedent particulars imposing themselves on the novel particular in process of creation. 2

This image of "bare incoming novel abstract form" Olson engages in the poem. The hardness of the vowel sounds underlines the sense of a harsh injection into the mind. Perfection of form is bare and sterile, the touch of cold metal on flesh. In his discussion of Greek generation of fact, Whitehead quotes from Plato's Timaeus concerning the theory of "the Receptacle," that cosmic construct which was responsible for imposing unity upon the confused events of nature. Plato speaks of "the welter of events and of the forms which they illustrate..." in the passage Whitehead selects, and Olson seizes on this marked denigration of particular objects and incidents. It is imposition as against informance which defines the gulf between Plato's and Olson's methodologies. Olson affirms that it is the accumulated incidents of his life which make him the man he is. He speaks of "the slow

2. Adventures in Ideas, p.242.

westward motion of /more than I am," and this encompasses both the daily movement of the sun, and the actual progression of North America's land mass westward.³ He sees his connection with the world as built-in to that extent, and he can employ the Greek constructs only in terms of negation:

This, is no bare incoming
of novel abstract form, this

is no welter or the forms
of those events, this

Greeks, is the stopping
of the battle

It is the imposing
of all these antecedent precessions, the precessions
of me, the generation of these facts
which are my words, it is coming

from all that I am no longer am, yet am,
the slow westward motion of

more than I am (MII, p.14)

Whitehead stresses how human experience reproduces the structure of physical nature; in particular he speaks of the transference of affective tone, with its emotional energy, from one occasion to another in any human personality, analogizing this to the vector transference of energy from terminus to terminus. It is this continuity or transference which the Greeks denied by their "bare incoming" of fact. That the external world has informed his personality and his imago mundi since the time of his physical birth, is the simplicity of which Olson would remind us. We continually change as the world makes its ingressions by way of the skin. There is, of course, the important qualification of man's selectivity. We are not passive instruments, but possess a certain definitive disposition.

3. Olson also refers to this phenomenon in the poem beginning "Astride/
the Cabot/fault," included in The Maximus Poems - Volume Three, p.37.

"There is no strict personal order/for my inheritance." Olson clarifies, however, again taking his cue from Whitehead. We do not, in fact, inherit our occasions of experience in "one-dimensional personal order;" that is, we do not exist as pure mental conduits, through which incidents are channelled one by one. As Whitehead sees the vector transference of energy mirrored in the transference of affective tone, so he sees the multi-dimensional character of space duplicated in human experience. This multi-dimensional aspect is supplied by the human body itself, which consistently augments and qualifies the incidents which are absorbed. Whitehead goes so far as to identify absolutely man's body and his soul, an equation which Olson was later to present definitively in the prose-piece "Proprioception:"

The peculiar status of the human body at once presents itself as negating the notion of strict personal order for human inheritance. Our dominant inheritance from our immediately past occasion is broken into by innumerable inheritances through other avenues. Sensitive nerves, the functionings of our viscera, disturbances in the composition of our blood, break in upon the dominant line of inheritance. In this way, emotions, hopes, fears, inhibitions, sense-perceptions arise, which physiologists ascribe to the bodily functionings. So intimately obvious is the bodily inheritance that common speech does not discriminate the human body from the human person. Soul and body are fused together. 4

The Greek vision of man as the pristine receptacle of fully flourishing abstraction, is replaced, for both Whitehead and Olson, by the bodily interpretation of actual incident. "No Greek will be able/to discriminate my body," Olson declares, so confident is he that the fusion of his organism and the external universe is the source of psychic and physical existence. "An American/is a complex of occasions,/themselves a geometry/of spatial nature," he elaborates, and in this instance his qualification of Whitehead's description is specifically geographical. As an American, and therefore possibly more instinctually aware of the informing powers of space, Olson makes the general law following, dramatically applicable to the Gloucester man, and indeed, to any North

American:

But the human body is indubitably a complex of occasions which are a part of spatial nature. It is a set of occasions miraculously co-ordinated so as to pour its inheritance into various regions within the brain. There is thus every reason to believe that our sense of unity with the body has the same original as our sense of unity with our immediate past of personal experience.⁵

According to Whitehead, therefore, the body absorbs occasions from the space contingent with it, and then pours these into the brain. Olson's concern in "Letter 27" is more with the body itself than the actual mental process which may result, since it is the skin which he takes to be both boundary and door. We are aware of his insistence that the circuit of energies in and out be unbroken. "I have this sense,/that I am one/with my skin," and it is a sense of the body as once again instrumental in perception and image-making. "Letter 27" concludes, not with the circuit image, but one of thoroughly spatial nature. Olson pictures his physical body as the resistance it truly is; the geography of Gloucester meets the mass of Charles Olson, and in accordance with Einstein's "General Theory of Relativity," its space is deflected backwards. The man and the geography interact, and are mutually changed. Such transformations, Olson informs us, are the essence of polis:

I have this sense,

that I am one
with my skin

Plus this - plus this:

that forever the geography
which leans in
on me I compell
backwards I compell Gloucester
to yield, to
change

Polis

is this (MII, p.15)

5. Adventures in Ideas, p.243.

The essay "Proprioception"⁶ is Olson's most detailed attempt to map out the actual process of man's energy transmutation. The piece is a consolidation of verbal jabs to our organism, Olson's prodding us toward a restructuring of our conception of the body's place in grasping the world. Its materials straddle both the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty⁷ and Jung's theory of individuation, but the essential message is urgent and unavoidable: "Violence: knives/anything, to get the body in" (AP, p.17). Olson does, in fact, resort to a kind of violently propagandistic prose in order to shake the supremacy of the purely mental cogito. Both empiricism and idealism are subordinated to the validity of the personally realized image; it is by a "proprioception" that we continuously reconstitute our world, and although Olson uses the Webster's Collegiate definition of the word, "sensibility within the organism by movement of its own tissues," he also reduces it to its roots, proprio and capere; one's own taking: the individual's grasp of the cosmos. By the instrument which is the body we arrive not only at an image of the world, "(the universe is one) is supplied" (AP, p.19), but in addition, at an image of self, a totality of soul in Jung's sense of achieved consciousness.

Olson begins the essay with a sketch of the basic elements comprising human physiology, but "physiology" is itself in small type, as is the "psychology" heading later in the essay. "Proprioception" on the other hand, is printed in bold capitals for it is this spontaneous

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6. It should be kept in mind that "Proprioception" is a transcription of one of Olson's personal "work-sheets," and was not originally intended for publication. The condensation of the prose is thus extreme.
 7. According to Ann Charters in Olson/Melville, Olson read Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Perception closely. The book is included in the bibliography compiled by George Butterick from texts specifically recommended by Olson in his seminars at the State University of New York at Buffalo in 1964. See Bibliographies to Butterick's "Annotated Guide."

visceral act that Olson sees as indicative of the true synthesis of physiology and psychology, or of body and soul. As one of his primary aims is to level the demarcation between physiological and psychological studies, the words themselves are allowed to meld with the typographical setting of the page. The essay aims itself to be a total image of self-discovery, Olson's intuitive speculations about his own functioning organism. Its divisions, therefore, are not distinct, nor its progression logical. We must move with Olson tentatively, even instinctually, sensing his meaning by a constant reference to our own organism, rather than absorbing it rationally. He begins with the body's most apparent aspect, the surface or skin covering which, as he notes, he had described in "Human Universe" as the meeting-place of man and his world. The next obvious component in our physiological make-up is the cavity of the body itself, and all the organs it contains. He refers here briefly to the "old psychology" of humours based on spleen, bile etc., prefacing his later elaboration on the role the body's cavity plays in our psychological development. The introduction's emphasis is, however, primarily on the viscera and their interoceptive movement. Again referring to Webster's Collegiate, we can define "interoceptive" as "relating to, or being, stimuli arising within the body, and especially the viscera." It is the idea that the body of its own order gives rise to stimuli, that Olson would impress upon us. Movement, even the self-creative urge which Whitehead saw transcending the universe, is implicit in our very nerves. In first portraying the human organism in its most basic aspects, skin surface and internal cavity, Olson gives us the elements of the traditional static view. Man still tends to think of the body as a mass moveable by his volition solely. Certainly we do not normally think of stimuli arising spontaneously within the visceral tissues themselves. We recall Olson's rejection

of one-dimensional art in "In Cold Hell, in Thicket:" "the branches made against the sky are not of use....," and it is in such terms of one-dimensionality and immobility, he posits, that we have habitually thought of the body proper. Movement we conceived a matter of conscious willing, a kind of imposition of mind on flesh and muscle, and to realize the body's innate sensitivity is to see it in a new three-dimensional wholeness, a living structure which is the key to our participation with the externally phenomenal universe. "To get the body in" is to reinstate its primacy in human perception and psychic growth, and the emphasis on movement down to the spontaneous exploration of the tissues, demonstrates how man and his world constitute a continuous circuit or flow. In Phenomenology of Perception, Merleau-Ponty emphasized the movement of the total organism toward the world as prerequisite to our sense of the body as a unity. If we were to remain static, we would never achieve bodily self-identification:

... we grasp the unity of our body only in that of the thing, and it is by taking things as our starting-point that our hands, eyes, and all our sense-organs appear to us as so many interchangeable instruments. The body by itself, the body at rest, is merely an obscure mass, and we perceive it as a precise and identifiable being when it moves toward a thing, and in so far as it is intentionally projected outwards... 8

Since it is movement of the total organism which endows us with a certainty of the body's physical delineations, how much more aware will we become given the knowledge of spontaneous visceral movement? Olson suggests proprioception as the initiatory step for enlightenment of the body-soul identification, and we begin to understand the significance of his assertion, "Today: movement, at any cost" (AP, p.17). It is likely that Olson chose the more general term "proprioception"

8. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), p.322.

over "interoception" because of its rooting in "proper" or "own." He remains acutely cognizant of the power of individual disposition or tropos, and of course, of individual placement in the world-field. He may first have encountered the term in Norbert Wiener's Cybernetics or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine, which he read in 1950. Wiener describes the part played by proprioceptors in acts as apparently simple as man's picking up a pencil. Again the emphasis is on the proprioceptive acts as spontaneous, independent of a man's consciousness:

Now, suppose that I pick up a lead pencil. To do this, I have to move certain muscles. However, for all of us but a few expert anatomists, we do not know what these muscles are; and even among anatomists, there are few, if any, who can perform that act by a conscious willing in succession of the contraction of each muscle concerned. On the contrary, what we will is to pick the pencil up. Once we have determined on this, our motion proceeds in such a way that we may say roughly that the amount by which the pencil is not yet picked up is decreased at each stage. This part of the action is not in full consciousness.

To perform an action in such a manner, there must be a report to the nervous system, conscious or unconscious, of the amount by which we have failed to pick the pencil up at each instant. If we have our eye on the pencil, this report may be visual, at least in part, but is more generally kinesthetic, or to use a term now in vogue, proprioceptive. If the proprioceptive sensations are wanting and we do not replace them by a visual or other substitute, we are unable to perform the act of picking up the pencil, and find ourselves in a state of what is known as ataxia. 9

This passage helps clear up Olson's definition of proprioception as "the data of depth sensibility" (AP, p.17), for it is by proprioceptive sensation that we are able to grasp an object at some spatial distance from us. Our eye perceives the object embedded in the depth of space, and the spontaneous movement of the tissues prerequisite to the grasping

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9. Norbert Wiener, Cybernetics or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine (1950; rpt. Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, 1967), p.7.

action permits our bodily movement through that space; it is in this way that we actually experience depth. Later in the essay, Olson defines "the DEPTH implicit in physical being" as "built-in space-time specifics" (p.18), and in spontaneously guiding our nerves and muscles to an incisive grip on the pencil, proprioception does in fact, guarantee our body's able manipulations throughout the space-time continuum. Our awareness of the four-dimensional world is thus built into the viscera themselves. Merleau-Ponty speaks of depth as the "most 'existential'" of the three space dimensions, in that it indicates definitively man's actual placement in a world of things, and Olson no doubt has this primordial relation of man and his external world in mind, when he makes depth a major issue in his demonstration:

More directly than any other dimension of space, depth forces us to reject the preconceived notion of the world and rediscover the primordial experience from which it springs; it is, so to speak, the most 'existential' of all dimensions because... it is not impressed on the object itself, and quite clearly belongs to the perspective and not to things. Therefore it cannot be extracted from, or even put into that perspective by consciousness. It announces a certain indissoluble link between things and myself by which I am placed in front of them, whereas breadth can, at first sight, be taken as a relationship between things themselves, in which the perceiving subject is not implied. 10

To sum up, therefore, proprioceptive acts are equivalent to spontaneous movement within the visceral tissue, and it is through such movement that we gain our bodily experience of the space-time continuum: to put it still more simply, both movement and depth experience are built into the human organism, prior to, and independent of, mental cogitation.

Olson moves next to his examination of "psychology" and what he accomplishes is essentially a correspondence to the physiological constructs of surface, cavity, and implicit motion. He begins by

10. Merleau-Ponty, p.256.

questioning the limiting interpretation of "consciousness" as ego; to stop psychic development at the ego stage is to condemn oneself to the superficiality of conscious sense experience. The surface contact of the skin characterizes this stage. Our organism projects outward to the world, and our sensory receptors absorb what the "single intelligence" selects. But as Olson makes clear, this is the full extent of sensory accomplishment. There is reportage only, and as yet no outward flow: "the surface: consciousness as ego and thus no flow because the 'senses' of same are all that sd contact area is valuable for, to report in to central" (p.17). In Jungian terms the ego is primarily such a receptive surface; it is conscious, and comprises sensory impressions, memories of actual experience, and the precepts absorbed through social conditioning. In order to achieve the individuation which amounts to true "consciousness" or "self," man must explore his own unconscious contents, the signs which repeatedly return to him in dream, for example. According to Jung, the achieved synthesis of a man's conscious and unconscious is a long and arduous struggle, often not realized until late in middle life. The "self" which emerges is the true centre or nucleus of the individual psyche, enabling us to reach a "four-dimensional wholeness" to continue in the terms which Olson's essay presents.

To progress beyond the surface stage of ego, there must be movement or "the working 'out' of [sense] 'projection'" (p.17). As Merleau-Ponty postulates that we can identify the body as a unity only by voluntary movement of its mass, so we begin to approach psychological identity by a directed flow of emotion. "Cry, if you must," Olson urges: "Wash the ego out, in its own 'bath'(os)" (p.17). He incorporates as well, the Cartesian terms inspectio and judicium, which we saw

as instrumental in the poem "John Burke." If we stop at the inspectio, the literal observation of external reality, we restrict ourselves to the surface contact or superficial ego. It is essential, Olson posits, that the inspectio be "followed hard on heels by, judgement" (p.17). As we have seen, this judgement or judicium will be partially informed by a man's proper disposition, and by his placement in space-time. Olson's equation of judicium with "dotha" in this passage may give some difficulty as this is, in fact, a word of his own origination. In Process and Reality (p.99), Whitehead relates the Cartesian judicium with Plato's $\delta\acute{o}\xi\alpha$ (doxa, the root of our "dogma"). As George Butterick points out in his editorial notes to "Proprioception," Olson confused the Greek letter ξ with θ in his transliteration of the word. He had had no Greek and the error is thus understandable, but we can see it as underlining his own sense of "judgement" as action, for he leaps instinctually at "doth," the archaic present indicative form of "to do." With both the literal body and psychic process, therefore, "movement, at any cost," becomes imperative. We cannot limit ourselves to either the surface of the skin or the superficial contact of the ego, if we wish to comprehend body and soul in their totality.

Corresponding to the internal cavity of the body is the "cavity/cave" (p.17) of the unconscious. Erich Neumann, a student of Jung's, states that the "the inside of the body is archetypally identical with the unconscious, the 'seat' of the phisic processes that for man take place 'in' him and 'in the darkness'."¹¹ As the body cavity is filled with "'organs'? for 'functions'?" (AP, p.17), so the cavity of the unconscious is filled with archetypes, themselves functional agents in

11. Erich Neumann, The Great Mother, trans. Ralph Manheim (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955), p.59.

the psychic life. In Aion-Researches into the Phenomenology of Self, Jung describes the archetype as "the image of instinct:"

... the whole of mythology [is] the expression of a universal disposition in man. This disposition I have called the collective unconscious, the existence of which can be inferred only from individual phenomenology. In both cases the investigator comes back to the individual, for what he is all the time concerned with are certain complex thought-forms, the archetypes, which must be conjectured as the unconscious organizers of our ideas. The motive force that produces these configurations cannot be distinguished from the trans-conscious factor known as instinct. There is, therefore, no justification for visualizing the archetype as anything other than the image of instinct. 12

We have repeatedly dealt with Olson's idea of the transmutation of energies within the body and their direction outward into the world, transformed and undiminished, in the shape of image. In his picture of the cavity of archetypes, we see more clearly the workings of this transmutation. Perhaps the most obvious example in Olson's own work with the alembic of archetype, is his generation of the imago mundi. The orb of earth "familiar to me as the smallest thing I know,"¹³ he perceives sensually, taking it in through the surface of his skin. But properly aware of its persistent primal power, he can rework the single perception within his own cave of darkness, drawing on archetypes which haunt him, until he has produced the completed image. The imago mundi may well have its source in Card XXI of the Tarot arcanum, the Anima Mundi or soul of the world. But the image or visual picture is itself an activating archetype for Olson, and thus it is the imago mundi which he produces at the completion of the psychic circuit.

Returning to the actual dynamic of the psychic process in

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12. C.G. Jung, Aion - Researches into the Phenomenology of Self, trans. R.F.C. Hull (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959), p.179.
 13. Olson, Causal Mythology, ed. Donald Allen (San Francisco: Four Seasons Foundation, 1969), p.9.

"Proprioception," we see that we are again confronted with the notion of placing or grasping an object in the depth of space. In this instance, it is the placement of the perceived "thing" in the depth of the unconscious: "The advantage is to 'place' the thing, instead of it wallowing around sort of outside, in the universe..." (p.17). The object will be inside us and yet not identical with the living tissue of our organism. It is in this way, Olson feels instinctually, that we make an image of world and self. He speaks in Poetry and Truth of the necessity of lighting one's own inner cavity of darkness, intuiting that this is what takes place in the image-making process. To arrive at image, particularly the cumulative image of self and world (Neumann states that "the integration of personality is equivalent to an integration of the world"),¹⁴ is most truly a "proprioception," reducing that word once again to its roots. "One's own - ception," as Olson analyses it, embraces both a grasping and a second birth. What strikes him most forcibly about his own demonstration of physiological and psychic proprioception is the parallel process. It is an instinctual feeling which he describes; once the outward flow of emotion is initiated, he senses the movement of the perceived object, and its placement in the depth of the body cavity, to be a visceral process. Because it is "the same third term" (p.18) which enables us both to grasp the pencil in physical space, and grasp image in psychic space, Olson speculates that what has been missing in our understanding of soul is, in fact, the body. "Here, then, wld be what is left out?" (p.18): his own assertion of the body's role is tentative enough to begin with, but in the paragraph entitled "the gain," he prompts us to such an affirmation. "Neither the Unconscious nor Projection..."

14. Neumann, The History and Origins of Consciousness, trans. R.F.C. Hull (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1954), p.359. Both texts by Neumann are included in the 1964 Buffalo bibliography.

have a home unless the DEPTH implicit in physical being - built-in space-time specifics, and moving (by movement of 'its own') is asserted, or found-out as such " (p.18). Olson is himself certain that his body is internally structured so as to facilitate the birth of image in his own archetypal depth. "Implicit accuracy, from its own energy as a state of implicit motion" (p.19), he assures us, and if we rouse ourselves to a primordial responsiveness, we will discover that the body's implicit energy and accuracy does participate in the process of image.

"The 'soul' then is equally 'physical.' Is the self. Is such 'corpus,' " (p.18). It is not through syllogism that Olson arrives at this equation, but an experiential self-description. He had revalued the perceptual powers of the skin itself as early as "Human Universe" (1950), and certainly the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty cites the body as the means by which we have a world: "Our own body is in the world as the heart is in the organism: it keeps the visible spectacle constantly alive, it breathes life into it and sustains it inwardly, and with it forms a system."¹⁵ Olson did accept this primacy, confident "that one's life is informed from and by one's own literal body..." (p.18). As Olson sees truth as the instantaneously taken thought, so Merleau-Ponty holds that we reconstitute our world with each bodily perception. He cautions us that "the absolute positing of a single object is the death of consciousness, since it congeals the whole of existence, as a crystal placed in a solution suddenly crystallizes it."¹⁶ In addition, he describes the body's symbiosis with the world in images which recall Olson's completed circuit:

15. Merleau-Ponty, p.203.

16. Merleau-Ponty, p.71.

The relations between things or aspects of things having always our body as their vehicle, the whole of nature is the setting of our own life, or our interlocutor in a sort of dialogue... The thing is inseparable from a person perceiving it, and can never be actually in itself because its articulations are those of our very existence, and because it stands at the other end of our gaze, or at the terminus of a sensory exploration which invests it with humanity. To this extent every perception is a communication or a communion, the taking up or completion by us of some extraneous intention or, on the other hand, the complete expression outside ourselves of our perceptual powers and a coition, so to speak, of our body with things. 17

Olson was later to see the basic elements of psychic proprioception constituting a whole structure of the divine. The cavity of the body, in its darkness and uncertainty, became for him synonymous with hell, although certainly not sharing the perjorative connotations of the Christian hell. The achievement of "self," or cumulative imago, corresponds naturally enough to heaven; and the initial perceptual act, our absorption of the exterior energies, is equivalent to earth itself. He yearns for a new mythological "discourse" in which "gesture and action, born of the earth, may in turn join heaven and hell, can be called proprioception" (AP, p.51). It is proprioception, our body/soul's innate sensitivity, which facilitates the movement of the perceived thing into the depth of the hell cavity, and the achievement of heaven by that placement.

The "identity" paragraph at the conclusion of "Proprioception" traces the process backwards: "therefore (the universe is one) is supplied;" the image which we create in our own darkness will be itself a microcosm, and we can think of it as being naturally supplied, provided our body meets the external flow with a proper instinctual stance. We are "the intervening thing, the interrupter, the resistor" (AP, p.18),

but by acting as impediment we paradoxically augment creativity, for the body's very tissue will spontaneously co-operate in the process of image. "The abstract-primitive character of the real (asserted) is 'placed'" is Olson's next stage in the reverse progression: the thing which we perceive should ideally be taken up by the eye in all its first freshness. As Merleau-Ponty explains, each time we see a tree, "the momentary arrangement of the visible scene should begin all over again, as on the very first day of the vegetable kingdom..."¹⁸ We are reminded of Olson's statement that even earth was "genet in an order of time" (AP, p.51). All things actually came into being in the real process of creativity, and it is in this primordial aspect which we should grasp them, if their energies are fully to inform our body and self. The "primitive-abstract," as Butterick points out, is an identification Olson took from Otto Rank's Art and Artist. Rank maintains that primitive creative art "achieves unity through abstraction in style; that is, by neglecting everything incidental, temporal, and individual."¹⁹ It is important not to confuse the "abstract" in this context with the Aristotelian abstraction of essence from substance, which Olson so abhorred. What the primitive eye concentrated on was the "self-existence" or physicality of any thing, and their abstract depiction caught these essential energies, not merely the superficial delineations or morphology. We can see the art of glyph, for example, as prefiguring the philosophical aims of phenomenology which Merleau-Ponty describes as "concentrated upon re-achieving a direct and primitive contact with the world... [it] is the study of essences..."²⁰ In "Letter to Elaine Feinstein" Olson had opposed the "primitive-abstract" to the "classical-representational," again drawing on Rank's discriminations. "Classical art" according to Rank "is based on the aesthetic

18. Merleau-Ponty, p.44.

19. Otto Rank, Art and Artist, trans. Charles Francis Atkinson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1932), p.69.

20. Merleau-Ponty, p.vii.

ideology of beauty, [and] achieves unity through conformity between and sheer identity of the specific ideology of art and the general ideology of the people..."²¹ The goal is thus some idealized form of beauty, the actual reverberations of an object's essence being overlooked in favour of the ideological gloss. The object which we place in our archetypal depth is of "primitive-abstract" character, if our eye has fixed on the first freshness of its quintessence, neither idealism nor egotism interfering with its directness. "Projection" as we have observed, is the most fundamental sense perception: "discrimination (of the object from the subject)" (p.19) Olson explains it, but these absorptions are, of course, the raw material of image. Preliminary to all else, and equally essential, are the contents of the unconscious cavity. Jung's "collective unconscious" provides the images of instinct which are essential to the transmutation process. Since the unconscious comprises the images of all men who have moved their bodies through the world, we can think of the cavity as containing a fluid all-encompassing universe. The final image we make from this fluid material will be palpable and instantaneous, and as Olson demonstrates, by means of the body's innate proprioceptive acts, it will be naturally and accurately made. The gradually emergent revelation of "Proprioception" was to remain a conviction with Olson. In an interview in 1969 his statement was assured: "I think our body is our soul. And if you don't have your body as a factor of creation, you don't have a soul."²²

In order to function most effectively as a factor of creation, man must maintain a poised balance in relation to the energies which pass through his skin, in and out. As Olson puts it in Special View,

21. Rank, p.69.

22. "I know men for whom everything matters,": Charles Olson in conversation with Herbert A. Kenny /August, 1969/," The Journal of the Charles Olson Archives, No.1 (Spring 1974), p.30.

"I emphasized there [in "Human Universe"] the skin (or the extreme of the fingertip, say) as both the boundary and the door, both in and out. And that otherwise one is invaded or invades" (p.32). Lacking the discriminating principle of selectivity, the human organism is taken over by a mass of confused sensation, and welter impedes creation.

In the term "middle voice," used in both music and grammar, Olson found a useful expression of man's most efficacious position in the world-field. He employs it first in "Tyrian Businesses" (1953), a poem which explores the cosmic laws with which our body must align itself. Like "Proprioception" it is a piece which increasingly reveals its message as it moves. The poem hinges on our sense of what the "middle voice" implies, for Olson asserts in the poem "...to command it/ is to be in business" (MI, p.36). In fact, Olson's own grasp of it appears to be largely intuitive; he states at the Berkeley Reading, "I mean I still don't know what it really means, but... the thing that makes music work is the middle voice."²³ It is difficult to judge the extent of Olson's professed ignorance here, but he was most probably aware that the "middle voice" in both instrumental and vocal music applies to that part which fills in the harmonies between the distinctive melody parts. The voice might act as a kind of tonal bridge, for example, between the soprano and alto parts in a choir. It is this idea of "filling in" which doubtless attracted Olson, for it is the way in which he conceives the human body when it is ideally operant, acting as a middle or transitional term between the world's phenomenal energies and those which man transmutes in his internal cavity. It indicates instrumentation, therefore; although the body is, in fact, a resistance to the flow of primal energies, what it stops, it equally absorbs, and in absorption, there is a reworking which results in act.

23. Olson, Reading at Berkeley, transcribed by Zoe Brown (Eugene, Oregon: Coyote, 1966), p.35.

That the poem is entitled "Tyrian Businesses" indicates its instructional weight within the context of the whole first volume of the Maximus poems. Maximus of Tyre, the fourth-century philosopher whom Olson sought to emulate in his own adoption of the title "Maximus," "placed the end of life in practical and not in theoretic virtue,"²⁴ according to his English translator, Thomas Taylor; this emphasis on activity and human function become for Olson, inextricable from the person of "his Tyrian." These concerns are truly "Tyrian" businesses, and we see that Olson and the Tyrian Maximus equally distrust the efficacy of discourse, while sharing the conviction that we each have our proper function:

Tell me, then, what fruits do you see and receive in discourse, and how do they subsist? Has anything good and useful germinated from discourse in your soul? 25

As horses, therefore, for their safety are allotted the race, oxen labour, birds wings, lions strength, and other animals something else; in like manner a connate power which preserves the race is present with man... In short, the good of everything consists in its peculiar work, its work in the necessity of use, use in the facility of power, power in the aptitude of instruments, and instruments in the variety of nature.²⁶

Olson sees man's function as "the active," and the body is the most apt of instruments in such performance. It is therefore the body of both man and woman with which "Tyrian Businesses" begins. His description of the male and female physique is direct, virtually existential. These are almost archetypal characterizations; man is known by his sinuosity, the muscular strength and manipulative power of the lion; woman, on the contrary, is weighted down by the mass of

24. Maximus Tyrius, The Dissertations of Maximus Tyrius, trans. Thomas Taylor (London: R.H. Evans, 1804), I, pp.iii-iv.

25. Maximus Tyrius, I, p.152.

26. Maximus Tyrius, II, p.131.

her breasts and hips, and as a consequence, her movement is lazy. We must come to these most basic recognitions, Olson insists, and the poem aims to be an advance into such physiological self-awareness:

The waist of a lion,
for a man to move properly

And for a woman,
who should move lazily,
the weight of breasts

This is the exercise for this morning (MI, p.35)

The initial tone is educational, Olson leading us out to a recognition of the literal organism we so often take for granted. "How to dance/sitting down" (MI, p.35), is the most important of methodologies. Even in stillness, the visceral movement persists, accurately participating in the internal dance of energies. Man engages the primordial world in the give and take of which creativity consists.

The next section of the poem proceeds with the picture of a woman who has become traitor to her body's own demanding function. Her movements forsake the naturally lazy and weighted, as she assumes a contorted prostration. She sacrifices dignity and verticality, masochistically craving physical subjection and psychic derision. The illustration makes its point: her bodily stance and her mental disposition are inextricable, and Olson gives us one of the most dramatic consequences of thwarting the body's inherent posture. In his "Annotated Guide" to the first volume of Maximus, based partially on conversation with Olson about the poems, George Butterick reveals that the women referred to are historically identifiable. It is the American dancer Martha Graham²⁷ who "craves to be scalped;" Olson

27. Butterick, "Annotated Guide," p.33.

apparently found the violence expressed in her choreography an index of physiological debasement in American society. "That international doll" is Madame Chiang Kai-shek, who had visited Washington in 1948, and been feted as Olson describes. But such identification merely underlines the image of bodily prostitution, pampering, and profligacy of energy which Olson powerfully conveys. "Tyrian Businesses" is very much a poem in which Olson's quintessential message unmistakably emerges. The poem proceeds by juxtaposition, and clarity of image. Following on the primitive opening portraits of the human body, the antithesis here is obvious, and in the depravity depicted we recognize the loss of an integral self:

or the one so far back she craves to be scalped,
and dragged over the ground

And because nobody has dragged her, she has everybody do it. She does it. She wants clean sheets, each night

as that other, that international doll,
has to have silk, when she is put up

(why is she put up with?)

in the white house (MI, p.35)

The poem then moves to another manifestation of bodily misuse. Where we forsake a direct and primordial contact with the world by way of the skin, we become possessed by the manufactured visions of the mass market, whether economic or political. "Or there are those sing ditties, that dead reason/of personality...;" These lines recall the "deathly mu-sick" of "Letter 2" (MI, p.8), the omnipresent jargon of the advertisers who distort human values and urge us to the empty joys of indiscriminate consumption. Layered by the vitiating phrases of an artificial world, "the body becomes a shell, the mind also/an apparatus." Olson despairs for the youth of North America who have been schooled in hedonism, defining the movement of energies purely in terms of entry to their own organism. Nothing is returned to the

world; there is no symbiosis, merely their regression to the water of the womb:

There are so many, children,
who want to go back, who want to lie down
in Tiamat. They sing:
euphoria (MI, p.35)

Into this accumulation of physical and mental deadening, Olson injects a self-portrait. He is the "land-spout," the vertical thrust of organism which he celebrated in "Letter for Melville 1951" (AM, p.37). The horizontal sprawl of language on the page is concomitant with the sprawl of the body and the sprawl of mind. "You can tell them this," he challenges, and it is the children prostrate in Tiamat whom he would enlighten. "The land-spout's/put all the diapers/up in trees...;" by his energy and intense immediacy Olson would rouse the children from their parasitical absorption, and turn human evolution back to its primitive stages. We did come down out of trees to walk erect as man, and reminded of the animality of our root, Olson feels we may better understand the force the body is, as well as the limitations of mankind. The sprawl of mind obscures the fact that we are sustained by energies larger than ourselves. But to command the middle voice is to be fully aware of this external sustenance, and of the necessity that we transform and return the live primordial force. The body is the transitional agent between external phenomenal universe and the universe of action and image which a man creates. It effectively fills in these two harmonies, facilitating entrance and permitting the outward passage. Thus in "Tyrian Businesses" Olson condenses the exterior energies to the concretions which are actually operant upon us. "There may be no more names than there are objects/There can be no more verbs than there are actions" (MI, p.36). If we confront those actualities immediately tangent to the skin, we will discover that "It is still/morning" (MI, p.36).

As long as there is a world, and as long as we have eyes to see, the desensitization of market conditioning can be overcome, but it is imperative that we first admit the body as the instrumental middle term.

The second part of "Tyrian Businesses" implements the middle voice instrumentation itself. Olson begins with the definition of the most personally informing of all the objects relevant to man, his own heart. We have seen that "Projective Verse" focussed on the heart as the source of man's breath, the self-existence of human kind. It is also responsible for the life-force which allows man to use his body as instrument. "A hollow muscular organ which, by contracting vigorously, keeps up the...", Olson leaves the dictionary definition open, for the heart "keeps up" all things, including ultimately, man's creation of a world image. The introduction of weather, and allusions to "M" and "G" may be cause for some confusion. Without knowledge of George Butterick's revelation that Olson derived this passage from Webster's New International definition of "metacenter,"²⁸ we nevertheless grasp that it is a question of balance or buoyancy, and that G probably denotes gravity. The "ukase" of section 5 (p.38) helps to clarify this reference, as does the sequent narration of a ship's upset when the captain attempts to scavenge free-floating timbers from the sea. Because Olson intends the variations of metacenter as image of the body's possible relations to the world, it is useful to study the definition in detail:

The point of intersection (M) of the vertical through the center of buoyancy (B) of a floating body with the vertical through the new center of buoyancy (B') when the body is displaced however little. When M is above the center of gravity (G) of the floating body the position of the body is stable; when below it, unstable; when coincident with it, neutral (p.1544).

28. Butterick, "Annotated Guide," p.34.

The displacement of a floating body so that a new centre of buoyancy is created, we can see as man's actual physical movement in space-time, accompanied by an instantaneous absorption of energies. With this movement or displacement, there is a restructuring of the energies already operant in the body. The vertical through the original centre of buoyancy we can take as a man's personal world-line; the vertical through the new centre, is the world-line of the incident or object he perceives. The point of intersection (M) is the intersection of the world-lines which, as we have seen, constitutes any single perceptual act. But the stability or positive absorption of the perceptual energies made available will, of course, depend on a man's bodily stance. If we are vertical and organically sensitive, our centre of gravity will be below the perceived experience. We will be receptive and absorb it from a firm base. However, if our centre of gravity is above the intersection of world-lines, our egotism interferes with what is "given," and there is upset. Like Ahab, man goes down because he has conceived himself as goal. When a man's centre of gravity and the point of intersection are exactly coincident, it is, as Olson points out "not very interesting." The body is unaware to the point of total indifference; in such a case, middle voice instrumentation has never been put properly in practice.

Having established how essential is bodily stance to the process of creation, Olson next selects two objects, emphasizing how he relates to them by physical disposition. "Nose-twist" is a popular term for the nasturtium, and we have seen in the "tansy" sequence Olson's interest in flowers, wild and cultivated. He catalogues the flower's characteristics in horticultural terminology, and yet his own emotional response

and literal absorption of its particularity is made obvious: "my beloved, my/trophy" (p.36) he states, and the objective reportage of the dictionary definition becomes consequently enlivened and sensually present: "climbing pungent" and "showy." "Totipalmate," the second of the selected objects, denotes the claws of birds in which all four toes are united in a web. Again, it is an adjective which would seem to have little creative potential for any man, a most difficult image to root in the body, and yet Olson succeeds in doing so by relating an incident involving the toc bird, itself totipalmate, which he had seen in Yucatan. The superstitious farmer's nephew and the self-admiration of the bird itself, invest the adjectival "name" with a creative and suggestive power. "There are no more names than there are objects," and any object is source for the body's creation.

As creation is built on instantaneous perception, so we consistently reconstitute our image of the world. Olson begins the poem's next section with such an image of continuing process, and immediate self-realization: "the seedling/of morning;" each perceptual act is capable of exfoliation, and each image can illuminate a fresh and primitive landscape. This whole section concentrates on the instantaneous novelty of creation. "He had noticed/the cotton picks easiest," and again we sense the ease with which creation follows on the primal perception of morning light, the clarity of the instant's impact. The dew on a flower is such a shimmering, totally filling the eye, and compounding a vision of jewels and stars: "As my flower,/after rain, wears/such diadem." There must be a continual remaking, with materials as vital as on the first day of their creation. The introduction of a man's teeth in the next stanza, is perhaps not so far fetched. Jane Harrison points out in her Themis that the tooth "because it is

practically indestructible, and perhaps also because it looks like a gleaming white seed-corn, is a symbol and supposed vehicle of reincarnation."²⁹ Because the tooth endures after the death of the individual, Harrison reasons, it might be considered to hold a vital stock of energy for use by the spirit in after-life. We can see that the tooth in its resemblance to the seed-corn, is a magical image of resurrective powers: so Olson saw each man as a composite of all his perceptual acts and forged images, each of them a new and resurrective grasp of the world: "As a man is a necklace/strung of his own teeth..." With regard to this section's concluding image, it is helpful to refer to George Butterick's guide, as he learned in conversation with Olson that the reference is to an apocryphal story of Christ. After his resurrection, Christ and his disciples passed by the carcass of a dead dog, its teeth bared. The stench offended the disciples, but Christ instructed them as Olson relates in the poem: "Notice/the whiteness, not/the odor of/the dead night." In this way Whitehead conceived his organisms as objectively immortal, once they achieved self-realization. They carry potential for creativity, and are the whiteness of further illumination. The transference of vector force from old image to new is no cause for despair, for the energies we have transmuted in the past will continue to inform the present making. As Christ pointed out, it is not the death, but the resurrective power, on which we should concentrate.

The poem has moved then, from man's heart to the real objects and actions which impinge upon him, to the body's proper stance in their midst, to the primacy of immediate perception. In the two-line stanza following Olson makes mythical image of the body's potential in creation. It is sweetness which we are capable of producing in our cavity, given

29. Harrison, p.435.

responsiveness to the things tangent to the flesh and eye. A man and a woman, Olson feels, will come to make their images in different ways, and thus he continues the sexual distinction:

(the honey in the lion, the honey
in woman (p.38)

From this body image he moves to a definition of happiness, which is also left open: "felicity/resulting from life of activity in accordance with." Again Olson brings in the idea of the metacenter, emphasizing how easily a ship at sea is displaced from its original centre of buoyancy, "when the wind/or the nature of the cargo/or a rip" modify its position. These are essentially external factors operant on the ship's bulk, just as the phenomenal world affects our body. The narrative tale of Moulton's folly is in effect a parable. The skipper desires the "windfall" of floating lumber, but he ignores the law of the metacenter. It is greed which motivates him, his bodily centre of gravity surmounting the point of intersection. He fails to take into account the real operative force of the objects he would appropriate for purely personal gain, and the consequence is, naturally enough, upset and destruction.

The conclusion of "Tyrian Businesses" draws our attention again to the definition of felicity, and indeed prompts us to complete it, applying the parable of Moulton's folly. "In accordance with what...?" and the poem's final image compresses the answer in an ancient archetypal sign. The fylfot, or swastika, as Jane Harrison points out "is a symbol combining motion and direction."³⁰ The direction of its arms is, in fact, to the right; that is, they follow the direction of the sun: "The notion of following the sun is world-wide. Starting no doubt

30. Harrison, Themis, p.525.

in practical magic, it ended in a vague feeling of 'luck'."³⁰ But a fylfot,/she look like,/who calls herself/(luck," Olson observes and if man is to be lucky, stable, and productive, he must act in accordance with the movement of the sun, and indeed, of the whole cosmos. It is a reiteration of the lesson of "Projective Verse;" if a man stays within his nature realizing that he is participant in the world's larger force, he will naturally come to artistic form and act. "Tyrian Businesses" cautions us against using our organic vehicle as Moulton did his vessel, ploughing insensitively through those elements which demand deference. The "futtocks" of the concluding stanza, the curved timbers scarfed together to form the lower part of a ship's compound rib, suggest a pun identity with "buttocks" which is surely not accidental. By Moulton's error, Olson would show us how not to move the vessel we are.

The grammatical construct of middle voice, which Olson introduces in "Grammar - a book" (AP, pp.27-31), underlines the musical definition of the term. He notes that in Indo-European there were seven grammatical cases, of which the middle voice was the seventh. It expressed "means or ablative of instrument" (p.29), and we are brought again to the notion of the physical body as receptor and transforming cavity. "MIDDLE VOICE is old passive!" Olson exclaims, and we can see the body's absorptive function as a kind of passivity, although certainly the process does not end there. The body is the "means" by which we create; as Merleau-Ponty phrases it, it is "our general medium for having a world."³¹ The middle voice is a frequently used construction in ancient Greek, and Olson enumerates the actions which it encompasses: the subject can be represented as acting on himself, for himself, or on

30. Harrison, *Themis*, p.525.

31. Merleau-Ponty, p.146.

something belonging to himself. This is, of course, the paradoxical development of the body's responsiveness in the apparently passive reception of energies. We begin as means or instrument, and thereby take in energies which allow us to act on ourselves (arrive at a wholeness of psyche), for ourselves (enliven our appreciation of the world and of our own creativity), and on something belonging to oneself (the restructuring of the imago mundi).

In "Maximus, March 1961-2" (MII, p.33), Olson sets up a demonstration of the middle voice in action. He gives us first the general physical setting, then a terse description of the immediate scene which touches his skin, and finally the revelation of self born of his transformation of topological force. "Show me/myself; "the verb is in the middle voice, and it is his body which acts as transitional term:

by the way into the woods

Indian	otter	
"Lake"	ponds	orient
show me	(exhibit	
myself)		

"Take the natural for base," Olson instructed in an early poem, "assume your nature as a bird his or as the grass" (AM, p.6), and this base, he maintains, is the body, its skin-covering, and its cavity. And the best way to comprehend the body's instrumental role in creation, he would suggest, is to enact it. Merleau-Ponty posits this as the sole means of realization:

Whether it is a question of another body or my own, I have no means of knowing the human body other than of living it, which means taking up of my own account the drama which is being played out in it, and losing myself in it. I am my body, at least wholly to the extent that I possess experience. 32

Olson had insisted on this experiential principle in "Human Universe:" "There is only one thing you can do about kinetic, re-enact it" (HU, p.10), and only in actual participation, he would claim, will we sense the wholeness of the circuit, and our organic bonding with the external world. The textual substance of both "Proprioception" and "Tyrian Businesses" for example, seems to inspire the reader's consciousness of himself as organism.

This rooting of epistemology in the body may stem from Olson's life-long observation of the fishermen of Gloucester, who survived by the adeptness of their hands and feet, as well as by the sharpness of their eyes. The first volume of Maximus is in part a celebration of their balanced economies, their bodily exertions equalling what they took from the sea. Like D.H. Lawrence, whom he cites as the only twentieth-century author to match "the fierceness and pity" of Melville, Dostoevsky, and Rimbaud (HU, p.112), Olson had had a direct awareness of a community based on physical labour. Theirs was not the vicarious sympathy of Pound's "enormous tragedy of the dream in the peasant's bent shoulders" (Canto LXXIV). It is interesting that in his Fantasia of the Unconscious Lawrence cites the solar plexus as our archetypal source, much as Olson later does the body cavity:

The solar plexus, the greatest and most important centre of our dynamic consciousness, is a sympathetic centre. At the main centre of our first mind we know as we can never mentally know. Primarily we know, each man, each living creature knowing profoundly and satisfactorily without question, that I am I. This root of all knowledge and being is established in the solar plexus; it is dynamic, pre-mental knowledge, such as cannot be transformed in thought. 33

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33. Lawrence, Fantasia of the Unconscious (1923; rpt. Surrey: William Heinemann, 1961), p.29. Olson recommended the preface of this book to both Robert Creeley in the bibliography to Mayan Letters and to Ed Dorn (AP, p.6). It seems probable that Lawrence's positing of instinctual knowledge in the solar plexus influenced Olson's notion of the body cavity as repository of archetype.

In several of the early Maximus poems, Olson deliberately draws attention to his own ineptitude at sea; in "Maximus, to himself," for example, he portrays himself as stumbling and clumsy on the deck:

I have had to learn the simplest things
last. Which made for difficulties.
Even at sea I was slow, to get the hand out, or to cross
a wet deck.

The sea was not, finally, my trade.
But even my trade, at it, I stood estranged
from that which was most familiar... (MI, p.52)

"Letter 6" he begins with an anecdote, relating how he was chided by his captain for wasting his eyes, the essence of his own mature philosophy of proper use:

polis is
eyes

(Moulton cried up that day,
"Where'd you get those glasses?"
after, like a greenhorn,
I'd picked three swordfish out of the sun-blaze
where no regular could afford to look,
to waste his eyes seeking a fin in that place (MI, p.26)

His respect for the fisherman's bodily proficiency, particularly his cautious handling of the resources by which he lived, underlines his unique valuation of the body's role in perception, and perceptual transformation. The complete attention which any fisherman gave his trade, Olson was to celebrate as the worthiest of methodologies:

They should raise a monument
to a fisherman crouched down
behind a hoghead, protecting
his dried fish (MI, p.114).

In the fisherman's crouching figure Olson saw exemplification of the "tender care" for resource; the body is specifically agency, and the protection of the fish is entirely dependent on the maintenance of the crouched posture. This simple illustration of man's physical relation to the sustaining phenomenal world, epitomizes Olson's radical

restructuring of epistemology. If his implied subordination of brain to body seems excessive, it is an excess having its origination in his primary ethos. Olson saw classical humanism as perpetrating the most damaging of illusions with its virtual sanctification of man's mental faculties. The most pernicious fallacy in consequence, was that of the brain's self-germination of idea; the simple fact that the external phenomenal world was root material for even the most abstruse cogitations, was obscured in the surge of ego. A theory of knowledge centred on the skin surface and body cavity obviously presumes information by a greater force, a truth which Olson sought doggedly to demonstrate.

Chapter Four

The Field

Together with the physiological law of breath, the poetic construct most often used to identify the work of the poets classified as the "Black Mountain School," is that of "composition by field." It is a highly resonant phrase, and the sense we grasp as Olson first presents it in "Projective Verse" must be primarily intuitive, as his own description of its methodology is more allusive than demonstrative. The image of the field appears in several of his early poems,¹ those written within three years following the publication of "Projective Verse," but there is little further explication of the construct in his prose. In "Letter to Elaine Feinstein," which editors have tended to append to "Projective Verse" as enlightenment of its message, Olson makes no mention of field composition but concentrates rather on line, syllable, and particularly the image. On the other hand, Robert Creeley and Robert Duncan, in prose essays and interviews, frequently elaborate on their applications of Olson's "open" compositional method. Indeed, Duncan's collection The Opening of the Field (1960), centres itself around this image, the book itself an exploratory celebration of the open form whose possibilities Olson had revealed to him. It would seem that in writing "Projective Verse" Olson made each potential poet a gift; he pointed the way to a form inextricable from content, and having given this brief but very evocative demonstration, moved on to his other overwhelming concerns, principally man's idiosyncratic creation of his own imago mundi, the lighting of his interior darkness. However, if a man were to do as Olson prompts and "catch himself up" to the

1. See for example, "The Dry Ode" (1951) (AM, p.42) and "In Cold Hell, In Thicket" (1951) (AM, pp.66-70).

reality science has given us, he would doubtless find the "field" of physics illuminating the principles Olson seemingly cast out as bare suggestion in "Projective Verse." It will become apparent, nevertheless, that the stance demanded of the poet engaging in field composition is identical with a man's disposition to the world in the creation of image, the act which endows life with order. Olson's life-work is, in fact, a continuity.

It is difficult to establish Olson's own sources for the field image. He would be aware of Pound's "rose pattern" in the dust, the natural emergence of "the immortal conchetto"² as iron filings array themselves along the lines of force in a magnetic field. In addition, Fenollosa speaks of the "entangled lines of force" in which the total energies of the universe consist, a picture which he undoubtedly also drew from the magnet's force field. Certainly by 1950 Olson would be cognizant of Einstein's efforts to solve the mystery of "unified field theory," science's attempt to reduce all physical phenomena to a most fundamental principle. As we noted previously, the idea which "shook loose" in the nineteenth century, affirming a fluid cosmos, was James Faraday's introduction of an electromagnetic field as the transmitting medium of electrical effects. Science had long acknowledged the existence of the classical magnetic field: we know that there is an attraction between the north and south poles of a magnetic bar and with the naked eye we can observe the field (the iron filings grouped in lines of force), which is the medium of the poles' interaction. Magnetic masses attract and repel one another with a force inversely

2. Pound, Guide to Kulchur (1938; rpt. London: Peter Owen, 1966), p.152. It is highly likely that Olson had also read Williams' essay "The Poem as a Field of Action" (1948) which suggests in the most general terms, the necessity of a freer measure.

proportional to the square of their distance, and it was the fact that this same law holds true for the attraction and repulsion of electrical charges, which prompted Faraday to postulate that they were likewise conveyed through a field via electromagnetic lines of force. In addition to the magnetic and electrical fields, we know by Einstein's "General Theory of Relativity" that there exists a gravitational or inertial field surrounding all matter. Einstein's introduction of such a field was in many ways similar to Faraday's conjecture. Until experimental substantiation of Einstein's gravitational theory, it was the Newtonian concept of gravitation which had been accepted by science: objects attract one another by a force proportional to the inverse square of their distance. Thus an identical law holds true for the attraction and repulsion of electrical and magnetic charges, as well as for the gravitational attraction of objects, and all these phenomena science now explains by the existence of fields which are the media for conveyance of action. In the last years of his life, Einstein concentrated on the "field" itself, in an attempt to discover the underlying properties of all fields, gravitational, electrical, and magnetic. A "unified field theory" would thus be a construct expressive of cosmic simplicity, and in selecting "field" as his compositional method, Olson hit upon a most accurate mimesis; he postulated the achievement of poetic form by that principle underlying the world's primary phenomena.

What the discovery of the field alleviated in all cases was the inhibiting concept of "action at a distance," inhibiting that is, in respect to the fluidity the primitive mind knows the world to be. For Newton, the gravitational attraction between two objects was an instantaneous action over the distance separating them. It was he, in fact, who originated the phrase "action at a distance" and in order

to undo the mystery, he had to have recourse to the intercession of God; it was the omnipresence of the Deity by which he explained the transmission of force from one mass to another. His is a picture of the world consistent with the Aristotelian and Cartesian disjunctions of substance and quality. Objects are isolate one from another; they require nothing but themselves in order to exist, and any connections amongst them are forged externally by God. Whitehead describes the Newtonian world-picture as founded upon the Law of Imposition. It is God's hand which speeds force across the vacuum of empty space:

...he [Newton] certainly thought that the conception of the solar system exhibited in his Principia was sufficiently ultimate to make obvious the necessity of a God imposing Law. Newton was certainly right to the extent that the whole doctrine of Imposition is without interest apart from the correlative doctrine of a transcendent imposing Deity. This is also the Cartesian doctrine. 3

Faraday's field re-established the primordial vision of flow, and James Clerk-Maxwell translated his idea into a revelatory mathematical form. We can think of the state of the electromagnetic field as at each point characterized by two vectors, the electric and the magnetic. These vectors will vary continuously in space and time as the electrically charged particle traverses the field. While Newton believed action at a distance occurred instantaneously in gravitation, Maxwell realized that in the electromagnetic field, particles radiate their charge at the literal speed of light. The traversing of any field takes time, therefore, and is not accomplished immediately as Newton had supposed. In order to take the gradual conveyance of charge into account, Maxwell developed differential equations: these equations trace the merest change in the strain of the field's electrical and magnetic force as the charge makes its way along the lines of force. They relate

infinitely small variations in the field's tension with infinitely small variations in space and time. We can think of differential equations, therefore, as giving an index of process, the continuous change in time as the particle crosses the field. The field is a "physical" medium with an internally regulating principle. There no longer exists the necessity that we philosophically posit a God as the external manipulator of force-transmission in gravitational and electromagnetic phenomena. "The expanse of the field" as Hermann Weyl describes it "is spread out according to laws of its own and of the utmost simplicity and harmony."⁴ This abandonment of the external manipulative position in poetic creation is the substructure presumed by "Projective Verse." The poet, Olson suggests, can no longer conceive himself as totally outside the poetic form, assembling aggregations of syllables at will. He is informed rather, by two natural laws: that of his own breath, and that of the field of the poem, the syllabic particles making their way along internal lines of force. Olson gives the poet the message not as suggested proposition, but as an inevitability: "From the moment he ventures into FIELD COMPOSITION - puts himself in the open - he can go by no track other than the one the poem under hand declares, for itself" (HU, p.52). For Olson, one enunciated syllable can declare what is to be its contingent syllable: "the field propagates from centers of excitation not instantaneously but with the velocity of light," Weyl states (p.170). Man's perceptions likewise move at such a speed, and in co-operation with the excited propagation of the syllabic lead, form emerges naturally from content.

As Weyl makes clear, field theory eliminates the problem of establishing laws of interaction between matter and field since they are, in fact, one continuum. To demonstrate the propagation of an

4. Weyl, p.170.

electron through an electromagnetic field, he uses the analogy of a water wave moving across the surface of a lake. Like the wave, the electron does not consist in one and the same molecular substance at all times, but derives its form from the field distribution. Even the atomic nuclei, Weyl points out, are "not ultimate unchangeable elements that are pushed back and forth by natural forces acting upon them, but... are themselves spread out continuously and are subject to fine fluent changes" (p.171). We saw exemplification of Creeley's conviction that "form is never more than an extension of content" in the phenomenon of complementarity, the charged electron manifesting itself both as self-contained particle and wave-formation. So the electron which disturbs the field, derives its form from the tensions implicit in the lines of force. Content and form are inextricable: the field cannot manifest itself without the electron or nucleus. Once their material contents enter the field, they are drawn into various manifestations of form as the field follows "its own laws in a quiet continuous flow" (Weyl, p.171).

And if electrons are primary contents of all matter, so Olson sees the syllables which comprise language as "the resistant primes in our speech" (HU, p.18), those etymological roots which by the art called logography, Olson sought to re-endow with the primacy and physicality they had possessed in their origination.

We have established that for Olson the poem is energy "transferred from where the poet got it (he will have some several causations), by way of the poem itself to, all the way over to, the reader" (HU, p.52). That he does not specify the sources of the energy indicates the extent of possible originations, but the essential point to grasp, is that the energy is not generated by man. We return again to the idea of the "actionable," that energy is larger than man, and that the human

organism is definitively instrument. Instrumentation or agency is the stance which "Projective Verse" demands of the poet, "how he conceives his relation to nature, that force to which he owes his somewhat small existence" (HU, p.60). Working from the force of his own self-existence in breath, and cognizant that the first voiced syllable will excite the field and "lead the harmony on" (HU, p.54), the poet becomes a participant in "the going energy of the content toward its form" (p.55).

Energy is transferred from poet to reader and between these termini there exists a field, persevering in its own quiet laws. In order to realize the field laws implicit in the sounded syllables, the preconditions must be those we have discussed: the poet's awareness that matter consists in fluid energy and as "twin to life" the poem is an energy-construct; that the instantaneous act demands total attention since there resides all that is happening; and that man is obedient agent for the "actionable." "Often I am permitted to return to a meadow,"⁵ Robert Duncan writes, and as the poet engages the field of the poem which moves in its own calm laws, he does enter "a place of first permission;" he perceives the regulating structure at the heart of things. He need no longer "act at a distance," bringing some extraneous form, whether standard sonnet or a set concept of line, to circumscribe the live verbal content. Individual syllables, infused and weighted by the poet's breath, will be conveyed through the field in very specific wave formations, determined by the laws of the field itself. Thus Olson would persuade us "that right form, in any given poem, is the only and exclusively possible extension of content under hand" (HU, p.52).

Weyl points out that the field if left to itself, would remain in "a homogeneous state of rest" and that matter is "the spirit of unrest

5. Duncan, The Opening of the Field (New York: Grove Press, 1960), p.7.

which excites it" (p.174). And it is spiritus, as Olson reminds us in "Projective Verse" which is the Latin for "breath" (HU, p.57). The voiced syllable is, therefore, the "spirit of unrest" which excites the initially homogeneous field of poetic possibility. In studying the open verse form we cannot think of the syllable in abstraction: it is rather, as Duncan phrases it, "the immediate sub-dictionary event."⁶ Its power is implicit in its immediate sounding; spoken by the mouth, the syllable is the ultimate product of man's blood and breathing. The visceral origination cannot be overlooked and indeed, the quality of the voiced vowel or consonant will vary from man to man. "That verse will only do," Olson asserts "in which a poet manages to register both the acquisitions of his ear and the pressures of his breath" (HU, p.53). If we take the enlivened syllable, that particular one which we enunciate now, we can easily think of it as a charged particle or electron. As it enters the field of the poem, it takes on a wave formation consistent with the field's laws, but we are aware that the medium of the field transmits both energy and momentum. The energy of the initial syllable will be carried away, propagated in a unique wave motion. Recalling Weyl's analogy of the water wave which is made up of different molecular consistencies at all times, we can conceive the excited energy of the syllable translating itself into other consistencies of the field: "For from the root out, from all over the place, the syllable comes, the figures of, the dance" (HU, p.54). The excited energy of one syllable leads to another, just as the energy wave propagates itself through the medium of the field. But as Olson clarifies, if the principles of the kinetic and field composition are to obtain, the poet should first adopt

6. Duncan, An Interview by George Bowering and Robert Hogg (Toronto: A Beaver Kosmos Folio, 1971), n.pag.

Edward Dahlberg's⁷ dictum that "one perception must immediately and directly lead to a further perception" (HU, p.52). The harmony will be led on only if the poet gives each instantaneous happening its due, allowing the immediately operant energy to work its full potential. As we have seen, these happenings will include a man's perceptual acts, his expulsion of breath in terminal silences, as well as the sounding of the syllables themselves. But it is the actual syllabic reverberation with which we are concerned here, and if the poet is properly attuned to the juxtapositions of sound which syllables suggest ("purchased at the highest - 40 hours a day - price" (HU, p.54)), the energy will be taken up by a new particle, and the wave of form propagated onward. The poet is thus seen to be highly participant in field composition; the flow of energy toward form presumes a life-time of study and accumulation, the ear acutely receptive to the whole continuum of sound, from harshness to sweetness: "Speech/is as swift as synapse/but the acquisition of same/is as long/as I am old" (AM, p.50).

In "For Sappho, Back" (1951) Olson had used the image of wind through long grass, blade after blade taking up its energy in a continuous undulation: "as grass blade by grass blade moves, as/syllable does throw light on fellow syllable..." (AM, p.79). Electro-magnetic energy is light, and thus the radiation of energy from one syllable to another is a lightening of form. But we must return to logography in order to understand that for Olson the emphasis on sound in no way necessitates the sacrifice of semantic content. "It is from the union of the mind and the ear that the syllable is born,"

Olson instructs (HU, p.54) and in his respect for the "primes" of speech,

7. The American poet and essayist Edward Dahlberg was instrumental in Olson's mythic/poetic development. "Part 4" of Call Me Ishmael is dedicated to Dahlberg; the relationship appears to resemble Olson's to Pound in its love-hate ambivalence. See, for example, Olson's attack on Dahlberg for glorifying both Christ and Socrates (LO, p.33).

he exploits the residues of the etymological roots, seeking always to restore that first potency. Should a man's awareness of root syllables be sufficiently comprehensive, the dance of the mind will be virtually limitless; any one sound fragment will suggest certain specific possibilities, both aurally and semantically radiant. It was in centring on the etymological primes of words, Olson believes, that Shakespeare arrived at the quantitative music of his late plays. He focussed an "intensity of attention" on the roots of speech which are our closest approximations to hieroglyph and ideogram and he thus "gets both music and image" by going in further to the word as meaning and thing..." (HU, p.93). Olson would seem to suggest, therefore, that either concentration will yield the other benefit. If we assiduously train the ear on the variety of the sounds of individual syllables, their etymological residues will spontaneously enter the dance of the mind. On the other hand, if we choose, as Olson holds Shakespeare did, to single out the eidetic root itself, then syllabic harmony will inevitably follow. At the conclusion of his Shakespeare essay, Olson comes very close to a detailed elucidation of the actual process involved in composition by field. He implies that the power of the syllable is "molecular,"⁸ capable of generating from itself other unique and contingent energies. This exfoliating power is not "apparent" in reality, he admits; at least, it is not apparent to anything less than a primitive mind. But it is the "undisclosed," and thus "the only truth." The fluid substructure is Faraday's field, permeating the whole of space, undisclosed and unapparent. But according to Olson,

8. Olson's use of "molecular" here can be taken figuratively. This passage hints at "composition by field," but is by no means an exhaustive explanation. By "molecular" he intended the spontaneously generating principle, but the electron is certainly the most appropriate image for the syllable's activity in field composition.

it is a spontaneously formulative principle of which we can avail ourselves in both poetic creation and daily life, if we first adopt a respectful stance. And such a stance will preclude imposition of rigidities, external manipulation of objects, and deliberate interference with flow. What holds as valid law in life Olson maintains, is equally applicable in poetic creation: "a tender care that nothing be lost," with the concomitant realization that we are each instruments of an ultimately incomprehensible mystery:

It is molecular, how this power is, why it all multiplies from itself, and from the element proper to its being. We are in the presence of the only truth which the real can have, its own undisclosed because not apparent character. Get that out with no exterior means or materials, no mechanics except those hidden in the thing itself, and we are in the hands of the mystery (HU, p.94).

"Projective Verse" becomes increasingly a lesson in obedience. Granted an awareness of the molecular power of syllable, the poet must do all he can to facilitate further generation, heightening his receptive, perceptive, and transmuting powers. It is a question of following the poem's spontaneous lead, rather than pushing word and image into preconceived theme and boxed form. Robert Creeley has described his method of composition as such a following of the rapidly moving radiant centre:

I'll start writing and fooling around, like they say, and something will start to cohere; I'll begin following it as it occurs. It may lead to its own conclusion, complete its own entry. Then very possibly because of the stimulus of that, something further will begin to come... Of course, I have no idea how long it takes to accumulate the possibilities of which the poem is the articulation. 9

Creeley's way, therefore, is to initiate some experimentation with sounds and syllables, trusting that something will cohere. We can see

the work of Olson, Creeley, and Duncan as at least theoretically characterized by the obedient stance. Olson's conviction that a single concrete object can lead us to the surety of macrocosmic vision, once invested with man's emotional and visceral concentration, could be relevant to any man, but the lead of the syllable is specifically the poet's potential. In "The Finger," Creeley asserts confidently and in almost child-like repetitive rhyme form, the inexorable undulation of the field toward form. His repetition of the adverb "here" in the poem underlines Olson's insistence on the primacy of the instantaneous grasp, whether of the wholeness of sound, or of the specificity of a perceived object or scene:

One thing
done, the
rest follows

.

Not from not
but in in.

.

Here here
here. Here. 10

The dots separating the stanzas represent breath pauses, and this passage illustrates well the essential role of the breath actually expelled in the reading of a "projective verse" poem. Creeley's breath is extremely shallow, and his voice itself low, so that any poem he composes is read in a seemingly hesitant manner, each single word accorded new weight and significance given the silence surrounding it. Robert Duncan has referred to the power of Creeley's "terminal junctures,"¹¹ and indeed the slow reading of this passage, itself containing the essence of Olson's poetics and of his philosophy of productive use,

10. Creeley, Pieces (New York: Scribner's, 1969), pp.13-14.

11. Duncan, Interview, n.pag.

evolves as a mantra, a prayer affirming the poet's trust in the self-ordering process of cosmos and poem. Because Creeley's work deals primarily with human relationships, particularly the ambivalence of love and hate between husband and wife, he uses a much more simple vocabulary than either Olson or Duncan, whose themes encompass quite literally, the structure of the cosmos itself. Creeley's verse, therefore, has consistently been built on monosyllables, or at most, words of three syllables, for his text derives inevitably from snatches of conversation or from an insistent mental phrase born of some emotional encounter. For this reason, the syllabic lead in Creeley's poems is at times very apparent, and Olson's concept of the etymological play is largely subordinate. But Olson had himself qualified the dogmatic nature of "Projective Verse," stating that "these notes... are meant, I hope it is obvious, merely to get things started" (HU, p.56); a poetic form which takes its root in the breath of the individual would, of course, allow for great latitude in the interpretation of its basic principles. Questioned about the unifying characteristics of the "Black Mountain group," Creeley replied: "I think there was a common feeling that there was something given one to write, and that the form it might then take was intimate with that fact. That is what I at least meant by 'Form is never more than an extension of content.'"¹² This is the outstanding unity of disposition in the poetic theory of Olson, Duncan, and Creeley. They are each agencies, and just as their bodily sustenance is drawn from the exterior phenomenal world, so the material of image, the impulse to write, and the implicit poetic form, are things "given;" the poet's task is to make receptivity an art in itself, Olson's sense, for instance, that the appreciation of sounds' potential is "as long/as I am old." It is both a humility and a trust,

12. A Sense of Measure, p.86.

and science's continued unfolding of the fluid process inhering in all matter, strengthens their belief that the poems' energies will seek their own forms. Creeley has therefore rewritten his concept of personal identity as would Olson himself: "I want to give witness not to the thought of myself - that specious concept of identity - but, rather, to what I am as simple agency, a thing evidently alive by virtue of such activity."¹³ In "Le Fou," an early poem subtitled "for Charles," Creeley acts as agent to an indentifiable syllabic lead. It is particularly difficult to examine Creeley's poetry on the page, disjunct from the man's own reading, but the multiplying of vowel sounds in this poem gives some index of the measured breath he grants each syllable:

LE FOU

who plots, then, the lines
 talking, taking, always the beat from
 the breath
 (moving slowly at first
 the breath
 which is slow —

I mean, graces come slowly,
 it is that way.

So slowly (they are waving
 we are moving
 away from (the trees
 the usual (go by
 which is slower than this, is (we are moving!
 goodbye¹⁴

The vowel sound of "fou" in the title is duplicated in the "who" of the first line; this "o" sound is then shortened in "plots;" the "th" of the adverb "then" repeats in the contingent article "the." "Talking" and "taking" play on the long and short "a", and the next word, "always," compounds the two variations. The conjunction of "t" and "s" sounds in the next three lines, as well as the three "o" sounds, succeed in slowing the enunciation of the words, and indeed the entire poem

13. A Sense of Measure, p.34.

14. Creeley, Poems 1950-1965 (London: Calder and Boyars, 1966), p.17.

progresses by such a weighting and stopping principle. Since much of Creeley's poetry advances tentative propositions about a constantly changing world, his forms as extension manifest themselves in a slow, cautious movement. In "Le Fou" Creeley verbally maps the slowness of his own breath, and the patience required in waiting for the graces to come, the insights or indeed, the syllabic leads. The final sharp vowel of "goodbye" terminates the poem, and according to the theory of "projective verse" it is in fact this syllable which determines the poem's cessation, not the will of the poet. He is but the instrument of contingencies which naturally present themselves.

Whereas Olson and Robert Creeley discovered as early as 1950 their concurrence about an open, or naturally unfolding poetic form, Robert Duncan was not to realize the full implications of the "Projective Verse" essay until at least three years after its publication. In an interview with the Canadian poets Robert Hogg and George Bowering, Duncan admits that when he first read "Projective Verse" in 1950, he thought that Olson was saying simply that poetry should be read aloud. It was not until his own oral reading of Creeley's short stories in San Francisco in 1953, that Duncan became aware of Olson's physiological emphasis, and of the import of a form emerging from content. He was able to overcome his traditional notion of classical poetic phrasing through the actual articulation of Creeley's sentence-rhythms, word-clusters determined largely by the breathing of the man: "So I think my breakthrough came when I came off whatever my idea was of resonances between phrases and learned how to read aloud a Creeley poem."¹⁵ Duncan taught two courses at Black Mountain College in 1956 while Olson was Rector, and significantly one of his classes dealt solely with the study of vowel clusters, consonant clusters, and

15. Duncan, An Interview, n.pag.

syllables.¹⁶ The Opening of the Field (1960) shows his definitive acceptance of Olson's field composition, although he retains and defends in addition, the more traditional forms in which he began as a poet, sonnets and even ballad structures. Duncan's mythological contents are remarkable syncretistic, and the person of Christ figures prominently in his poems. It is natural, therefore, that he interpreted Olson's syllabic lead as a manifestation of the power of the Logos, the spoken word of God which generates cosmos, and of which Christ is the embodiment in the world. The syllabic harmony in Duncan's work is probably more apparent than in that of either Creeley, or Olson, but again Olson's concept of etymological play is hugely qualified. Duncan is concerned, rather, with the constellation which any given word becomes, the agglomeration of human experiences, myths, personal, and literary contexts, which adhere to verb and noun: "To come into 'house' or 'dog', 'bread' or 'wine' is to come into a company,"¹⁷ he asserts, and thus it is the constellations of distinct words which inform his poems.

In his ongoing series entitled The Structure of Rime, the concept of obedience evolves as a central theme. More than either Olson or Creeley, Duncan continues to elaborate on the actual growth principle of the poem within the textual substance of his poetry:

I ask the unyielding Sentence that shows Itself forth in the
language as I make it,

Speak! For I name myself your master, who come to
serve.

Writing is first a search in obedience. 18

16. "Introduction" to Special View, p.9.

17. Duncan, "Rites of Participation - I," Caterpillar, 1 (1967), p.9.

18. Opening of the Field, p.12.

The introduction to Bending the Bow (1968) confirms his persistent faith in the validity of the poetics of yielding. He will take his lead from the syllables themselves, although uncertain of what will emerge: "I enter the poem as I entered my own life, moving between an initiation and a terminus I cannot name."¹⁹ Trust is placed in the almost infinitely generating potential of the poem's field, the syllables in their multiple possible connections. Like Olson and Creeley, Duncan repudiates the idea that he is manufacturer of the poem, laying down discrete paths in verse. In theory and practice he affirms he is an instrument:

... I get the drift I do not
know. The Word moves me. I give in to it.
I give into it my will, into it
the intent of the poem... 20

In "Passages 10 - These Past Years," Duncan composes a testament of love, yielding simultaneously to the motivating image of the lover, and to the incitements of sound. His play on verbal constellation is quite straightforward in this passage:

Willingly I'll say there's been a sweet marriage
all the time a ring
(if wishing could make it so) a meeting
in mind round the moon
means rain.

In the beginning there was weeping,
an inconsolable grief

I brought . 21

19. Duncan, Bending the Bow (New York: New Directions, 1968), p.iv.

20. Bending the Bow, p.137.

21. Bending the Bow, p.29.

The repeated short "i" of "willingly" makes up an internal harmony, the three groups of weighted "l's" induce a soothing rhythm in "willingly I'll," and the generation of "sweet" from "been" may itself call forth "marriage." Marriage suggests the bonding for "all the time" we live, and the "ring" is both that enclosure of symbolic eternity, and the physical token of the bonding. It suggests to Duncan also the magical rings of fairy tales upon which one "wishes," and the short "i" is again an echo. A "meeting" is what the poet desires with his lover, but it is also significant that the ring is a meeting of all points. There is an alliteration of "meeting" and "mind," while "round" identifies the shape of the ring, and is simultaneously an adverb modifying "moon." The "ring around the moon" ineluctably enters the composition, and as rain now follows, so must a man's weeping, and Duncan is brought through syllabic contingency and verbal suggestion to the "inconsolable grief" which was attendant on the relationship's beginning. This is one of the simpler passages exemplifying Duncan's engagement in syllabic harmony and connotative radiations. It is most important to grasp the essential notions of verbal incitement and poetic obedience, at least as Olson and Duncan would have us understand them. Since it is a form most densely knit with a man's own physiology, it is difficult to break up the poem's fluidity, seeking the excited leads. To assume that Olson, Duncan, or Creeley deliberately apply techniques of assonance and alliteration in the process of composition, is to question the heat of their conviction. As we noted previously, "recognition" supplants intentional composition in "Projective Verse:" "The objects which occur at every given moment of composition (of recognition, we can call it) are, can be, must be treated exactly as they do occur therein and not by any ideas or preconceptions from outside the poem..." (HU, p.56). The

emphasis is always on the poet's being informed from a source outside himself. He recognizes some live element tangent to his being, to his ear perhaps; he has met it before, and will thus have some sense of its fittingness. Many possibilities will present themselves, and of these only one be recognized as capable of continuing the operant lines of force.

As clarification of this receptive creativity, Olson draws our attention to one of our habitual misconceptions about nature, in a group of poems written in 1964. Most of us persist in assuming that colour is primary, an actual physical attribute of the object we perceive. Optics has long established, however, that the white light which falls on any object is of a composite character, a spectrum varying from red to violet. Dependent on the nature of the object illuminated, certain colours of the spectrum will be totally absorbed, and those which are reflected comprise the colour taken up by the eye. Thus Olson advances:

Colour is reflective (the opposite of primary

Colour should come from somewhere

It follows. It is (grammatically)

demonstrative (AM, p.224).

In demonstrating the illusory nature of colour, emphasizing that it, in fact, comes "from somewhere" and is not in-bound to the object itself, Olson pushes us toward certain conclusions about our perceptions in general and indeed, about poetic creation. We recall his definition that "there is a sentence you do have... You are not free than otherwise to perceive" (AP, p.55), and our own grammar and sentence-structure he sees emergent from our placement in the phenomenal world. As we cannot separate image from the stuff it works on, nor can we separate our slightest act from the environment external to our organism. But

the exterior energies which inform our life's total grammar, are the "givens" which inform the poem. As colour is not primary to the flower, nor are image and syllabic harmony primary to the poet. These elements also come "from somewhere," from the phenomenal universe, from the structure of language itself, and from the physical field of nature whose laws Olson believes can be translated to the poem. "It follows," we would read ordinarily as a transitional phrase in a logical equation, but Olson intends it quite literally. Colour does follow after the object's flooding by light, as syllables follow once the poet admits the informing principle of field. It is significant that the three "colour" poems included in Archaeologist of Morning are attributed to William Dorn, a sixteenth-century alchemist, whom Olson mentions in the Beloit lectures, Poetry and Truth (p.48). We have seen that Olson was attracted by Carl Jung's theory of individuation, and it was in reading Jung's Psychology and Alchemy that he first encountered the writings of Dorn. The precept on which he enthusiastically seizes is Dorn's conviction that "in natural things, there is a veritas efficaciae" (PT, p.56). The idea that natural objects themselves contain a demonstrative truth quite naturally appealed to Olson, with his manifest faith in the illuminating powers of image, born itself of the concrete thing. Dorn's axiom validates, in addition, the self-regulating law operant in the field theory of matter. Even prior to his study of Whitehead, perhaps by way of Confucian process and Pound, Olson had already intuited that poetic creation could be brought into line with the natural principles resident in the material world. By observing with the primordial or archaic eye, Olson maintains, we can grasp a verity which a man might effectively apply to his own creations. Dorn speaks of freeing spirit from its fetters by means of this discoverable truth, and if we substitute breath for spirit, his metaphysical description

becomes directly relevant to the natural efficacy of field:

There is in natural things a certain truth which cannot be seen with the outward eye, but is perceived by the mind alone [sola mente]. The philosophers have known it, and they have found that its power is so great as to work miracles.

In this [truth] lies the whole art of freeing the spirit [spiritus] from its fetters...

As faith works miracles in man, so this power, the veritas efficaciae, brings them about in matter. 22

Olson concludes the first of the poems which he attributes to Dorn: "Color is the Fruits/or the Four Rivers of Paradise" (AM, p.223); colour is definitively a product or emanation of an ultimately ineffable source. It is the radiation of light of which colour is the evidence, the other necessary elements being a reflecting surface and a receptive human eye. Olson's duplication of Dorn's evocative aphorisms make both poems portentous; he desires the reader to seek his own effective applications of the colour image. The basic instruction of the pieces is clear. In centring on the apparent aspect of colour, we slight the undisclosed nature of the phenomenon. That optics has to some degree explained perception of colour in no way diminishes the mystery. The effects of light will perhaps never be fully understood, and primitive man's awe of the sun was more accurate than superstitious. The two poems are an enlightening variation on Olson's dominant theme: we are sustained by ubiquitous forces, and yet cling to the fallacy that we are each largely self-contained. It is by the external medium of light that we see colour, and not merely by some innate propensity of the human eye. And it is by the truth inherent in natural things, Olson is convinced, that we come to poetic creation. Image is supplied by objects. The line is an outgrowth of our own most natural principle, the breath which is life. (Olson would have us keep in mind that breathing itself

22. Quoted in Jung, Psychology and Alchemy, trans. R.F.C. Hull (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953), p.256.

is dependent on energies we did not create.) The methodology by which the poet can now come to an open form is provided by the very medium which allows the transference of energies through space. For Olson, therefore, and for all poets practising "projective verse," it is physis which supplies the lead.

In Olson's early poetry, the process of syllabic excitation incorporating etymological play, is readily identifiable. In the first Maximus letter, written contemporaneously with "Projective Verse," the initial stanza of section 6 carries on an alliterative connection: "the bow-sprit, bird, the beak" (MI, p.4). The three nouns have a rhyme in the final hard consonant which demands precise enunciation. Thus each noun is in a sense an isolate containing the instancy of its own self-existence. They are compact monosyllables, images of completed vector force, and yet the alliteration sustains the form. We see evidence of what Olson means by etymological play with the introduction of "bend" in the second line, most likely suggested by the Old Teutonic root of "bow:" beugan "to bend." And "bend" itself reinforces the tense projection of vector force which the poem celebrates. Olson would have the body as a taut wire, vibrating to the immediacy of external stimuli. The phrase, "the law of object" (line 4) proceeds by a duplication of vowel sound, and it is perhaps the harshly expelled breath of the syllable "ject" which generates "strut after strut," the repeated "t" sound forcibly illustrating the real presence of the breath in composition. The derivations of "strut" encompass the Old Norse strutr "conical cap," the Norweigan strut "spout," and the Old English strutian "to exert oneself;" all connotations underline the total instantaneous thrust which Olson idealizes in perception and poetic creation. In tracing the lead of syllable in Olson's work, we must

make allowance for the New England pronunciation of certain vowel sounds. The short "a," for example, is modified to a sound approximating the short "o." Thus the "mast" image of the stanza's final two lines bears some vocal resemblance to the imperative "must," which is a natural enough connection given the injunctive nature of the stanza as a whole. The adjective "tender" evokes the uttermost exertion of "strut" and the vertical thrust. It is tendre "to stretch out," and by such a full reach Olson would have us utilize the energy potential of the split second.

"In Cold Hell, in Thicket," written shortly after "Projective Verse" was published, exemplifies the generation of theme through etymological play. The poem deals, as we have seen, with man's distancing from the integral arc of space and indeed, from the vibrancy of individual objects. His assertion in the poem that "all things are made bitter" (AM, p.66) is understandable within the social context of the proliferation of advertising in America in the early 1950's. Extrapolating from the principles of "Projective Verse" we can assume that Olson began the poem with the single phrase, "in cold hell." We saw in "Ode on Nativity" that he equates heat with the most intense transmutation of perceptual energies, and since it is the absence of such heat which the poem deplores, Olson's hell must be cold. Applying his rule of the connotative dance, we find that "hell" derives from the Old High German helan "to hide." The initial root of the poem thus implies obfuscation, the grease which obscures both real objects and the words which harbour their essence. By over-familiarity we have perhaps lost the root which "thicket" still contains, the Old English thicet "thick:" it was possibly Olson's awareness of the derivation of "hell" which suggested this second image of dense concealment. From condition he moves to

the cause, the "abstract," by root conveying literally "the drawing away," which was for Olson the removal of an object's live content. We can see these opening words either as dictating or as underlining the themes of the poem. In either case, Olson's claim that the poem progresses by an etymological dance can be substantiated.

As he moves into the later poems of the first volume of Maximus, Olson's work becomes increasingly characterized by the "musical phrase" rather than the syllabic lead. Robert Duncan suggests that this is the natural result of Olson's engagement in the largest possible themes, the meaning of history, and the wholeness of cosmic structure: "Charles and I are forced out into the phrase because we deal with big concepts, and then we get really enraptured and enthralled with whole moving thematic ideas..."²³ In "a Plantation, a beginning," written in the winter of 1957-58, Olson incorporates the facts he has discovered about one of the first winters experienced by settlers in Cape Ann. The stanzas are for the most part of three lines, and while we are able to grasp some internal rhyme and alliteration, the emphasis on the syllable as radiant particularity is definitely absent:

I sit here on a Sunday
with grey water, the winter
staring me in the face

"the Snow lyes indeed
about a foot thicke
for ten weekes" John White

warns any prospective
planter (MI, p.102)

The inclusion of quotations from document which Olson had himself investigated does, of course, militate against the spontaneous generations of the single syllable. His devotion to learning as much about Gloucester as humanly possible necessarily undermined the methodology of

23. Duncan, An Interview, n.pag.

field, for his definition of history demanded the presentation of document, and document is factual prose. Many of the pieces comprising the second volume of Maximus are extracts drawn virtually verbatim from Olson's history source texts, and then broken into individual breath lines. The reportage of a trial for adultery is such an example (p.20),
 is
 as/"Further Completion of Plat" (p.42), his own prose rendering of land allotment and inheritance in early eighteenth-century Gloucester. These pieces have their place within Olson's own vision of his ongoing poetics, as demonstrations of the Herodotean method. Any criticism of Olson must touch on the comprehensiveness of the man's enthusiasms; his conception of history, which he had formulated in the lectures delivered at Black Mountain in 1956, becomes by the late 50's his overriding methodology. By the early 60's and the writing of the "Dogtown" poems which will be examined in a later chapter, Olson focussed his energies increasingly on the image-making function of the individual man. The mythological positing of cosmos becomes all-important, as is evident in the lectures Poetry and Truth given at Beloit College in 1968. At Beloit, Olson elaborated on his own interpretation of dogma and subjectivism, his definitions emerging as we shall see, from the scientific revelation that there is a limit to the exactitude of the knowledge we can possess.

The poems comprising the second volume of Maximus, we can group generally according to Olson's two overwhelming concerns: the history poems, evidencing his application of the Herodotean uncovering of truth, relevant either to Gloucester or the Sumerian origin of civilization, and the mythological poems, explorations of the process by which man comes to a unifying image of self and world. It is the girth of the world that Olson would encircle, and consistent with his own philosophy,

the achieved images must be restructured with each unique perception. As the imago mundi reveals itself to Olson repeatedly as the Golden Flower, his interest in the Divine becomes more fully articulated. Engaged in the making of a psychic/cosmic picture, Olson's poetic compositions centre themselves on the breath line and the natural informance of image. He definitely does not abandon his conviction that the poem once "under hand" will seek its own orders. These orders manifest themselves, however, as phrase groupings built out of syllable; after the Maximus poems of 1953, we see few remnants of the complex issue of etymological suggestion. In his preference for monosyllables and the more quotidian themes of personal relationships and visual perception, Robert Creeley's work continues to reside in the syllabic particular, the "sub-dictionary event." Robert Duncan, despite the unbounded nature of his ongoing Passages sequence, holds closely to the principles of "Projective Verse," his compositional method strengthened perhaps by his own spiritual reference to the Logos. Since his Passages series began in Bending the Bow (1968), it has embraced themes as diverse as Duncan's own mystical studies, the war in Viet Nam, and a celebration of homosexual love. To the most recently published of the Passages, Duncan supplies a subtitle, "these lines/composing themselves in my head as I awoke/early this morning, it being still dark." He sustains a more exact application of field methodology than does Olson himself. The words, Duncan assures us, enter his mind as visitation, and we can see the syllabic harmony as generative of the poem's further orders:

Let it go. Let it go.
Grief's its proper mode.
But O, How deep it's got to reach,
How high and wide
it's got to grow,
Before it come to sufficient grief...

I know but part of it and that but distantly,
 a catastrophe in another place, another time,
 the mind addresses
 and would erect within itself itself 24

In the recently published volume III of Maximus, Olson does seem more consistently to re-engage the syllable, at least in terms of its sound potential. This revitalization of one phase of the originally dogmatic propositions of "Projective Verse," may stem from the fact that volume III marks the completion of his most burning tasks. Volume I had successfully demonstrated the Herodotean method and the benefits to be gleaned through fixed attention. As we shall see in the chapters following, the second volume painstakingly maps out the world-making procedure. The final Maximus collection is largely devoted to self-examination, a day by day judgement on the cumulative achievement of one Charles Olson. This achievement includes, of course, the imago mundi only just gifted to mankind, and so the volume presents a series of instantaneously made pictures, each rendered through its own particular heat. "To build out of sound the walls of the city" (MIII, p.194), he aspires in one of the later poems, and it is a demand which Maximus Volume Three frequently satisfies. The epigraph, for example, is a three-line structure compacting a resolute certainty; all the strongest permutations of the English vowels are included so as to publicize perfectly the book's political and cosmic intentions:

having descried the nation
 to write a Republic
 in gloom on Watch-House Point (MIII, p.9)

Perhaps one of the most beautiful poems of the third volume is "West Gloucester," built upon the syllables comprising the zoological identification of the star-nosed mole, condylura cristata. It is perhaps

these gentle sounds which inspire a sensuous description rare in Olson's poetry. The syllables generate an appreciation of the tactile, and of the colour sense, usually left implicit in the object-name itself:

the lovely mushroom growth
of its nose, snow-ball flake pink flesh
of a gentian... (MIII, p.26)

On the other hand, nowhere in the volume is the etymological substructure as complex as that we find in the very first volume of Maximus. And again, there are pieces which seem to verge on the prosaic statement more properly expressed in essay form, the following being one of the more outstanding examples:

a peri-Mediterranean syllabary neither Greek nor Egyptian nor Semitic
but in between them such as the lines Eratosthenes ran before Pytheas
were as good as all the distances of the globe then turned out to
be ... (MIII, p.192)

Whatever Olson's later modifications of the principles he had first mapped out in "Projective Verse" in 1950, the basic revolution in stance which he had demanded in the essay's opening, remains unchanged. All three poets continue to confirm their role as instruments in poetic creation, their informance by syllabic resonance a variation on their informance by energies on the cosmic scale. Olson had urged Cid Corman to move "out away from any declared base (which becomes a strait jacket)..." (LO, p.85), and to find the key to form within himself. Once the poet discovers the possibilities inherent in his own breath, he must refine his modes of sensory receptivity; listening for the syllables "40 hours a day" gives some index of the extent of work involved. The poet's abandoning of the security of received forms and imposed measures will

be an arduous task, as Olson well realizes, for it is not to "free" verse that the poet succumbs. He must master, instead, the most difficult of principles, estranged as he is from both his own physiology and the resonating potentials of language. Olson judged the American poetry prevalent in 1950 to be lacking in viscera. Neither the physical internality of the poet nor the residual primes of words were taken into account in a poem's creation. Body and word were husks, exploited for their most superficial aspects. What Olson demands in essence, is a total vulnerability, a ceding to the laws in which physis consists. It is a yielding out of strength, therefore, and since only the poet who recognizes energies as primordial and sustaining will glean a usable methodology from Olson's dogma, the ceding is revealed as love. Man's apprehension of image is initially an enthrallment by object, and in trusting the lead of syllable, the poet posits an absolute faith in the invisible, ineluctable process of energies. But the receiving of the Beloved demands careful preparation, and before the process of field will unfold in the poem, the poet must have established a thoroughgoing familiarity with the potentials of breath and sound. "One loves only form," Olson declares in the first epistle of Maximus (MI, p.3), "and form only comes/into existence when/the thing is born." The ease of his statement subsumes all the prerequisite study and practice. The form which is a natural outgrowth of content will have drawn on many manifestations of the poet's love. But the practice and patience do pay dividends, according to the practitioners of "projective verse." Robert Duncan describes the flow of form initiated, given study and our total investment of self in the immediate perception:

each actual moment a seed
 where Love enters the Milk-Light flows from the Center²⁵

25. Duncan, Tribunals (San Francisco: Black Sparrow Press, 1970), n.pag.

In "The Escaped Cock," an essay on D.H. Lawrence, Olson delineates clearly the artist's ideal relation to the world, and we can easily transpose his injunctions to the methodology of the field:

- ...the clue: open, stay OPEN, hear it, anything, really HEAR it,
And you are IN.
.....
1: the day of my interference is done
2: compulsion, no good; the recoil kills the advance (HU, p.125)

The poem is capable of propelling itself forward, and the responsiveness Olson urges us to in this passage, illuminates why "projective verse" is also called "open." The Lawrence essay was first published in 1951, and as we have established, once Olson formulates his "special view" of history, the ramifications of field composition proper are left to the descriptive talents of his adherents. It is as though he himself embodied the urgent growth principle of Whitehead's organisms; satisfied that he had disseminated the principles of "projective verse" sufficiently well, he moved on to a further self-creation. Robert Duncan elucidates much more explicitly than does Olson, that the poem's orders demand a like ordering in the life of the poet himself. He translates Olson's proposed stance into a sacrament celebrated within the household. Not a single syllable will enter the field until the orders of love rule daily life. Olson casts out the large, suggestive propositions, and Duncan renders the theoretical methodology instructive image:

In the field of the poem the unexpected
must come.

We wait.

It does not come.

There is a disturbance in the House.
I had forgotten its orders. The plants
ask to be watered.

If we have not set things to rights,
the indwelling
is not with us, there are no instructions. 26

In two early poems, both written prior to the publication of "Projective Verse," Olson celebrates simply the essential role of love in human existence. "Only the Red Fox, Only the Crow," is a plea spoken by the dead of two North American Indian tribes, a people fully aware that resources were entrusted to their care, not bestowed as inalienable right. "Make much of love... make most of love," they implore. (AM, p.4), and Olson is a willing mouth-piece. The poem "Troilus" laments a society in which love is absent: "Means wither. Bodies, gestures fall./ All nature falls" (AM, p.3). It is the desiccation of Olson's cold hell, objects and words subjected to misuse, strewn at random, and the rebirth of love is what the poem would inspire. "The path, love is the path," Olson enunciates, and by the poet's observation of love's orders, a path will naturally reveal itself in the field of the poem. It is perhaps significant that Whitehead had described energy in Adventures in Ideas, as having "recognizable paths through time and space" (p.238).

The revealing of the path presumes the poet's immersion in the natural world; the perceptions and images which enter the poem induced by the syllable's excited lead, have their source in his accumulated experience, and for Olson such experience will take "the natural for base" (AM, p.6). The perceptual grasp has thus the intensity of the sun's heat; the transmutation of image should be as natural to the poet as is the process of photosynthesis to the plant: "You who can seize/ as the sun seizes.../...Who acts/as swiftly as a plant turns light to green..." (AM, p.102). The generation of image in the field, however, will be no "bare incoming" but an emanation of "all those antecedent predecessions, the precessions/of me..." (MII, p.14). In all his fervour for the instantaneous perception, manifested particularly in "Projective Verse" and "Human Universe," Olson had begun to question

the viability of including in his poetry images drawn from intellectual pursuits. He writes to Robert Creeley from Yucatan in 1951, "I am still harping on this problem of mine, reference: constellations..." (ML, p.17), and clarifies in a later letter that he had in mind then, particularly his own studies of the Tarot, and of Mayan civilization (p.28). Creeley appears to have resolved this quandary, however, by reminding Olson that what the mind has once seized as intensity, it can so retain. This assurance was to expand Olson's sense of the poem's thematic potential, and he sends Creeley an affirmative translation of his own dictum: "what you sd: that force STAYS, IS & THEREFORE STAYS, whenever, whatever: that is what/we are concerned with/It breaks all time & space" (ML, p.75). The realization that he could effectively incorporate the living heat of some past study, was tantamount to possession of a new world. In "Maximus, to himself" he ponders the substance of Creeley's gift:

But the known?
This, I have had to be given,
a life, love, and from one man
the world (MLI, p.52).

Thus many elements can justifiably enter the field of the poem, seeking a fitting place for themselves in the fluidity of the whole. It is again Robert Duncan who makes a careful discrimination between the purely personal stream of consciousness, and the spontaneous excitations of the syllables themselves. It is not the poet who dictates what will follow, but the reverberating sound which strikes the ear:

The poem is not a stream of consciousness, but an area of composition in which I work with whatever comes into it. Only words come into it. Sounds and ideas. The tone leading of vowels, the various percussions of consonants. The play of numbers in stresses and syllables. In which meanings and ideas, themes and things seen, arise. So that there is not only a melody of sounds, but of images. Rimes, the reiterations of formation in the design, even puns, lead into complexities of the field. ...we reflect that the ear is the organ not only of hearing but of our equilibrations. 27

"/The blessing/that difficulties are once more," Olson had exulted in "The Songs of Maximus" (MI, p.14), and the poet's entry into field composition he defined in just such terms of productive adversity.

The renouncing of the manipulative poetic will demands a psychic conversion, and understandably the process of initiation will be taxing. The poet must cope with the sudden loss of security, his own hopes of an ultimately achieved form now uncertain. He has ceded the right of deliberate choice, and the ramifications are terrifying:

But a field
is not a choice, is
as dangerous as a prayer, as a death, as any
misleading, lady (AM, p.69)

Danger takes its root in the Latin dominum "ownership," and in prayer, death, and the embroilments of seduction, we give ourselves over to the power of another, ignorant of the consequences. This is the poet's condition once he engages in the methodology of field. He may wait long hours in despair, for although ideally the syllables should propagate at the speed of light, it is of the nature of creative co-operation that there be gaps of inactivity. The poet may fail to recognize the lead when it presents itself, or be himself insufficiently attuned to the resonating potentials. He must persevere in the most attentive possible stance, taut and unwavering, as Nut herself maintains her body in a flexing arc:

He will do what he now does, as she will, do
carefully, do
without wavering (AM, p.70)

In two poems based upon his studies in the Tarot, "The Moon is the Number 18" and "La Torre," Olson continues his imagistic treatment of the realities the poet will confront in the field. Both poems were written in 1951, when Olson's major preoccupation is still the permutations of field itself. "/And all motion/is a crab;" the poet chafes at

the frustrations of waiting in the first. Deprived of his accustomed "action at a distance," he finds his receptive role wearing, a trial by nerves. According to Aleister Crowley, whose interpretation of the Tarot Olson had read in 1949, the moon of Card XVIII is "the poisoned darkness which is the condition of the rebirth of light."²⁸ Thus the poet endures the excoriations of patient uncertainty, his body poised to catch the sound which will generate the poem. Like crab and cat he strains his senses to the utmost:

The blue dogs paw,
lick the droppings, dew
or blood, whatever
results are. And night,
the crab, rays round
attentive as the cat to catch
human sound (AM, p.74)

Card XVIII depicts a path or stream which flows between two barren mountains, nine goutts of blood dropping down upon it from the moon. "It needs unconquerable courage to begin to tread this path,"²⁸ Crowley instructs, and the blood which falls might be the poet's own, the source of the breath by which sound manifests itself. "The moon has no air;" Crowley's meaning is oblique, and Olson incorporates the line into the poem, a compressed image of the poet's desolation and his acute breath-consciousness, once he enters the field. "This is the threshold of life; this is the threshold of death,"²⁸ Crowley marks out the potential ambivalence, and Olson demonstrates the speed at which the poem propagates itself, should the syllable he catches be generative of vitality:

... words blow
as questions cross fast, fast
as flames, as flames form, melt
along any darkness (AM, p.74)

28. Aleister Crowley, The Book of Thoth (1944 ; rpt. New York: Samuel Weiser, 1974), p.112.

It is a "red tower" which the projective poet builds for himself, a tower built of his own viscera perhaps, and there with the attentive cat and crab, he sits in a like tension, positing the potential of instantaneous sound against the received canons of number and image, the seductive sortilege of traditional forms and personae:

In the red tower
in that tower where she also sat
in that particular tower where watching & moving are,
there
there where what triumph there is, is: there
is all substance, all creature
all is there against the dirty moon, against
number, image, sortilege -

alone with cat and crab,
and sound is, is, his
conjecture (AM, p.75)

Where "The Moon is the Number 18" concentrates on the potency of the single syllable and the agonies of taut awareness, "La Torre" demonstrates the need for a constant regeneration of sound. Once the poet discovers a single syllable which fits, he should allow its entry, and its evaporation. To cling to its substance, willfully desiring its repetition, is to frustrate the natural progression of the poetic orders. Thus Olson seizes on Card XVI of the Tarot which depicts a burning, broken tower. Crowley interprets the card as illustrating "the destruction of existing material by fire," but notes that the card is also attributed to "the Hebrew letter Pe, which means a mouth."²⁹ The mouth utters the unique syllable which leads the harmony on; each tower of awareness is consumed as its syllable is spoken, and the existing material crumbles in order to generate further harmonies:

To destroy
is start again, is a factor of
sun, fire is
when the sun is out, dowsed (AM, p.76)

29. The Book of Thoth, p.107.

Olson would dowse the intensity of the impinging syllable, facilitating its expiry once it has made its particular contribution. The unrelenting destruction of the towers is part of the poet's self-schooling. He weans himself from "action at a distance" by the deliberate breaking up of existing orders. There is always the danger of falling back on the traditional harmonies, the imposed order of custom, and although such established orders may indeed fit (be demanded by the field itself), they can likewise interfere with the lead suggested by the syllable only just expired. But the poem might equally celebrate the conflagration of closed forms, and the erection of the red tower which houses the practitioners of "projective verse." "The destruction of the garrison may therefore be taken to mean their emancipation from the prison of organized life, which was confining them," Crowley states. "It was their unwisdom to cling to it."³⁰ And it is unwisdom to cling to the syllable once it has indicated its contingent sound:

In the laden air
we are no longer cold.
Birds spring up, and on the fragrant sea
rafts come toward us lashed of wreckage and young tree.
They bring the quarried stuff we need to try this new-found strength.
It will take new stone, new tufa, to finish off this rising tower.
(AM, p.77).

"On these rejectamenta," Olson had described the materials of the birds' nests in "The Kingfishers," "... the young are born" (AM, p.45). It is Whitehead's reading of the completed organism's objective immortality. Death is regeneration, and thus the syllables move the whole spontaneously.

"The Dry Ode," also written in 1951, draws Olson into its orders with a syllabic cluster demanding concentration and the most precise enunciation. "It pusheth us out," it begins. The poet who receives these syllables must himself initially stumble in their pronunciation,

30. The Book of Thoth, p.108.

pushed by the sounds themselves to a recognition of their vigorous independence. The growth principle of the poem is inherent in its own making. Within this greater construct, the poet's heart is but a participant seed, his head the flowering product of a cosmically animating principle, the spontaneous propagation of energy through the field:

It pusheth us out before it, out, and to the side.
Gray stalks in a green field.
Young corn in clay. And the heart,
a seed. And the head,
how heavy is the yield? (AM, p.42).

Chapter Five

The Uncertainty Principle

We have seen that Einstein's "General Theory of Relativity" substantiated Olson's "sensing" of space as force, while "The Special Theory" validated his conviction that truth issues from a man's immediate condition. Werner Heisenberg's "Uncertainty Principle" was similarly to corroborate his sense of human limitation. Heisenberg's revelation is surprisingly easily stated; he discovered that in micro-physics the very act of scientific observation creates a disturbance, thereby interfering with the final result. In the microcosmic sphere, therefore, science cannot boast the precise thoroughness which it had long posited as its goal. Heisenberg points out, for example, that the external devices used to determine a particle's position, will inevitably interfere with its velocity. Olson had seized on this dramatic tempering of man's intellectual omnipotence as early as 1947 when he outlined the principle in Call Me Ishmael (p.68). "You can observe POTENTIAL and VELOCITY separately, have to, to measure THE THING. You get approximate results. They are usable enough if you include the Uncertainty Principle, Heisenberg's law that you learn the speed at the cost of exact knowledge of the energy and the energy at the loss of exact knowledge of the speed." One aspect is ascertained only at the expense of another. A purely objective observation of microphysical activity is as unrealistic a hope, as is the reinstatement of a purely objective structure of time and motion. Man necessarily intrudes on the evidence he would keep pristine:

Nature thus escapes accurate determination, in terms of our commonsense ideas, by an unavoidable disturbance which is part of every observation. We decide, by our selection of the type of observation employed, which aspects of nature are to be determined and which are to be blurred in the course of the observation. This is the property which separates the smallest particles of matter from the range of our commonsense concepts. 1

Nor did Heisenberg believe that the uncertainty relation was a temporary problem which man would ultimately solve. We are confined to a certain range of inaccuracy, a truth which qualifies for all time the Renaissance vision of man's intellect as potentially limitless. For Olson, therefore, Heisenberg's proposition amounted to liberation from a recognizably false ideal. But as Heisenberg points out, man did not confront his insuperable limit until he had gone sufficiently far in his investigation of the consistency of matter. It is Planck's discovery of the quantum of energy, as we noted previously, which marks the transition from classical to modern physics. The quantum leaps, observed but as yet unexplained, are indicative of the mysterious potency of matter which may well continue inexplicable:

The hope that new experiments will yet lead us back to objective events in time and space, or to absolute time, are about as well founded as the hope of discovering the end of the world somewhere in the unexplored regions of the Antarctic... It is equally wrong to speak today of a revolution in physics. Modern physics has changed nothing in the great classical disciplines of, for instance, mechanics, optics, and heat. Only the conception of hitherto unexplored regions... has undergone decisive transformation. 2

The Special View of History owes as much to the "Uncertainty Principle" as it does to the "Special Theory of Relativity." Olson readily

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1. W. Heisenberg, Philosophic Problems of Nuclear Science, trans. F.C. Hayes (London: Faber and Faber, 1953), p.73.
 2. Heisenberg, p.18.

responded to the demonstration that a totally comprehensive knowledge was no longer a possibility for mankind, incorporating the notion of limit directly into his description of history: "By history I mean to know, to really know. The rhyme is still 'mystery.' We can't stand it. Nothing must be left undone. We have to run up against the wall. There is nothing which happens to us which we don't have the right to know what... goes on. Even to know that one can't know" (pp.20-21). He used the phrase "Uncertainty Principle" as an image inclusive of the more comprehensive context of relativity which has become man's quotidian inheritance. The emphasis on immediate location posited by the "Special Theory," confines man's certainty of time and motion to the split second. In addition, we have Olson's interpretation of Whitehead's process: "purpose is seen to be contingent, not primordial" (SV, p.49). Our perceptions and consequently our acts, are dependent on our location within the continuum. Like Whitehead, Olson necessarily repudiated a teleological vision. It is significant that in reading Weyl he seized on the term "autocatalytic multiplication," a genetic theory which posits "life [as] the chance success of a play of creative accidents" (Weyl, p.299). Our own acts are equally uncertain; as with Whitehead's electromagnetic occasions, we cannot predict the further consequences of activity born of an immediate space-time coincidence and proximity. As Weyl points out, "... it must be remembered that a complete knowledge of the present is possible only on the basis of its consequences which reach to the end of time" (p.210). Moreover, physics is becoming increasingly characterized by statistical laws. In microphysics scientists are able to speculate only about the probability of an occurrence; the determinant character of law which holds in classical physics is not applicable in the micro-regions of the modern. Weyl stresses this statistical aspect in Philosophy of

Mathematics and Natural Science, and his descriptions doubtless intensified Olson's awareness of the extent to which uncertainty has infiltrated human knowledge:

It will now be understandable that most of the physical concepts, especially those concerning matter with its atomic structure (e.g. the density of a gas) are not exact but statistical, that is, they represent mean values affected with a certain degree of determinacy. Similarly, most of the usual physical "laws," especially those concerning matter must not be construed as strictly valid laws of nature but as statistical regularities (p.199).

... in the natural conduct of physical research, statistics today plays at least as important a part as the strict laws (p.202).

Thus Olson can assert justifiably in Special View that "the condition itself is the penetralium (the innermost secret)" (p.32). He borrows here from the vocabulary of John Keats, whose theory of "Negative Capability" Olson saw as prefiguring directly Heisenberg's revelation. Keats' description of "Negative Capability" serves as second epigraph to the lectures comprising Special View. The first is Heraclitus' dictum that "man is estranged from that with which he is most familiar," and the "familiar" is for Olson man's body and physical environment. We are estranged from the fact of our cellular role in an entire "company of the living" (SV, p.25), and as well, Olson maintains, from the inescapable limits of our own cognitive powers. The "familiar," therefore, the living body and mind of man, is inextricable from the idea of limitation. What Keats urges is a yielding in grace to the endemic condition of partial darkness:

... several things dovetailed in my mind, and at once it struck me what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in Literature and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously - I mean Negative Capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason -

Coleridge, for example, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetralium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half knowledge. This pursued through Volumes would perhaps take us no further than this, that with a great Poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration. 3

Keats' conjecture on what he considered a specifically poetic condition, Olson saw as universally applicable, given the scientific corroboration of the "Uncertainty Principle." The two concepts dovetail in Olson's mind: "... what Heisenberg gave us the wonderful words for to go with Keats' ambiguity: The Uncertainty Principle/Right out of the mouth of physics one can seize the condition Keats insisted a man must stay in the midst of" (SV, p.39). Born disparately of poetic intuition and scientific experimentation, the two principles reinforce Olson's long-standing conviction that man's proper cosmic stance is a humilitas, in the face of ultimately inexplicable forces which sustain him. But most importantly, the removal of traditionally secure structures - the dissolution of objective time and motion, together with the revelation of inherent experimental limitation - for Olson demonstrates the absolute necessity that each man structure his own world. The Greek concept of physis embraces the actual mind of man (his natural powers, parts, temper, disposition), and Olson endorses such a synthesis. Not that the natural world cannot exist without man - the opposite is rather the case - but that within the total context of relativity, man applies his own ordering function second by second. Where our condition is admittedly mystery, doubt, and uncertainty, the truth of the split second and immediate location assumes an even greater significance than the "Special Theory" alone could grant it. The "Uncertainty Principle" does modify for all time the content of what is knowable, and confronted

3. H.E. Rollins, ed., The Letters of John Keats (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1958), I, pp.193-94.

by such a limit, man should more naturally value that instancy in which he can posit certainty. Olson's vision of man's ordering function presumes a real familiarity with physis. It is no longer the Newtonian clock-work cosmos which obtains. A man is intimately tied to any fact he perceives, and the objective framework maintained by a ubiquitous Creator succumbs to the more random "chance success of the play of creative accidents." The Hopi Indian grasped the subjective aspect of nature, and the mythologies of all men attest to the dangers attendant on human omnipotence. Robert Creeley stresses that we can no longer stand outside of reality, a truth exemplified in the painstaking recording of ambiguity and ambivalence, in his own poetry and prose:

In all disciplines of human attention and act, the possibilities inherent in the previous conception of a Newtonian universe - with its containment and thus the possibility of being known - have been yielded. We do not know the world in that way, nor will we. Reality is continuous, not separable and cannot be objectified. We cannot stand aside to see it. 4

Olson designates the world order revealed by the "Special Theory of Relativity" as not "the most interesting" (SV, p.47). Einstein's image is of a world shifting and protean, dependent on the live eyes of man to make its time and motion momentarily absolute. Order, therefore, reverts to man: "If order is not the world - and the world hasn't been the most interesting image of order since 1904, when Einstein showed the beauty of the Kosmos, and one then does pass on, looking for more - than order is man" (SV, p.47). He later clarifies that "man is actual determinant, each one of us, a conceivable creator" (p.49). Again, it is all too easy to confuse the idea of ordering with the imposition of form, whereas for Olson it is rather a process of energy absorption and transmutation. Like Keats, Olson has no wish to overcome the condition

of uncertainty or ambiguity in which he finds himself. Negatively capable, he admits the limits, and invests his energies in the most potentially revelatory of all conditions, his immediate phenomenal field. "Feeling which is all...",⁵ he wrote to a friend in 1966, referring her to Whitehead's "philosophy of organism." It is the fact that we are organic, that we feel, that our disposition prompts us in a certain direction, which facilitates the whole process of world image. Whitehead posited the ongoing material creation of the world, the very interchanges of energy, on feeling, the affective relations which one actual entity may develop for another. This was his imaginative interpretation of matter's consistency, where science itself is yet at a loss to explain why protons and neutrons bond together in the nucleus of an atom. Whitehead explained the bonding as prehensions originating in feeling, and Olson would likewise suggest that man so orders his contingent realities: "And man's order - his powers of order - are no longer separable from either those of nature or of God" (SV, p.49).

In Special View Olson re-examines one of the most ancient of cosmologies in the light of this discovery. It is a question simply of following his substitutions. Chaos, the "elementary principle," is equivalent to ongoing process, the ground of relativity itself. Spirit, we should recall, is for Olson inextricable from body, "Proprioception" establishing definitively the body-soul equation. From the cosmology of the Phoenicians he is able to evoke the organic origination. Man as ordering function is shown to be implicit in the myth's very texture:

The Phoenicians believed that Chaos was the elementary principle whose union with Spirit produced Desire (pothos); and that Desire in its turn combined with Chaos and Spirit, to produce what they called by the word Mot, and which was mud or contaminated water. (The generative process completed itself by Mot producing the Egg of the Universe which broke in half to make heaven and earth). Now Hesiod reflects some of this in his still mythic cosmology, for out of Chaos

5. Joyce Benson, "First Round of Letters," Boundary, II, 2 (Fall 73/ Winter 74), p.360.

(which he says was mist and darkness) was begotten Erbos [sic] and Night as well as Eros or Desire. You will note, therefore, that what we now see by centring again the order-question away from Kosmos back to man as source of his own sense and act of order, that the displaced element in the old cosmology was not desire but the previous term of it, physical enjoyment. Physical enjoyment was - and here the perception of the ancient was extremely subtle - identified with Chaos itself, and only out of its jointure with Spirit could Desire come. Actually, then, the truth of present observation only refines and corrects the most ancient myth-cosmos (SV, p.51).

Spirit in Olson's schema would certainly encompass innate disposition, the flow of feeling to object, and the "allowability" which the awareness of our own physicality makes manifest.

As well as the Phoenician, Olson draws heavily on the Norse cosmology contained in the Poetic Edda, in his substantiation of man's origination of cosmic order. His interest in the mythologies of the Norse stems in part from their early explorations of North America: "by carbon date/1006..." (MIII, p.76) in "Lancey Meadow" Newfoundland. In several poems of the second volume of Maximus, he suggests there had been some synthesis of Norse myths and those of the Algonquin Indian, a tribe which populated the eastern coast of America. As Gloucesterman, therefore, he would stand to inherit whatever infiltration of Norse to Algonquin mythology there might have been. Chaos in the Poetic Edda is Ginnunga Gap, which in a letter Olson described as "a big mouth eating practically without in fact anything like to eat."⁶ Ginnunga Gap does, in fact, signify a gaping void or gullet⁷ according to Murray Fowler, the commentator on Norse religions whom Olson mentions in Poetry and Truth (p.22). In "Maximus From Dogtown - IV," Olson's attempt at a cosmology which combines Norse and Hesiodic elements, as well as pilferings from Weyl, Ginnunga Gap becomes translated simply

6. Joyce Benson, "First Round of Letters," Boundary, II, 2, p.360.

7. Murray Fowler, "Old Norse Religion," in Forgotten Religions, ed. Vergilius Ferm (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1950), p.239.

as "hunger." Man's hunger for order is what brings world-structure into being. Otherwise we are overcome by the chaos of relative motion and time, and statistical probabilities. In fact, Olson repudiates statistical proofs in this section of the poem. The ambiguity of scientific cosmology is supplanted by the decisive human appetite for structure:

The problem here is a non-statistical
proof: Earth 'came into being'
extraordinarily early, # 2
in fact directly following on
appetite. Or
as it reads in Norse
hunger, as though in the mouth
(which is an occurrence, is 'there,'
stlocus)

that the Earth
was the condition, and that she
there and then was the land, country
our dear fatherland the Earth (MII, pp.163-64)

Olson was, of course, naturally drawn to a cosmology based on hunger and indeed, the mouth. We have seen that in Special View he takes the root of both mythology and history to be "what is said;" from the mouths of men emanate the only truths we can know, other than those we speak ourselves. And of course, contained in this poetic passage is Olson's insistence on the cosmogonic potential of the actual space-time co-ordinates. The occurrence is "there;" Earth was "there" and "then" the land. Without immediate condition we make nothing, Olson instructs, neither act, nor form, nor earth's structure. "Stlocus" is

a borrowing from Whitehead; the term, explained in Process and Reality is actually "strain locus," that condition which allows a physical object its mode of "presentational immediacy," a phrase which is largely self-explanatory. We can think of "strain locus" as that characteristic of enduring physical objects which permits the human eye to grasp them momentarily at rest.

In the lectures Poetry and Truth, Olson introduces his subject by asserting that the poetic condition is now the condition of all men. Robert Duncan similarly conceives each of us as "making up"⁸ our reality for each moment we live, and for Olson the transmutation of world image is such a quotidian and democratic process. The consistent restructuring of our world is demanded by the shifting ground-net in which we find ourselves. The Newtonian support is pulled away, and as Olson implies, we must conceive our own organism as the single ordering structure in the mesh of world lines: "... the six directions are, front, back, left, right, up and down, and that at any point - those are the vectors on which you actually are experiencing things" (PT, p.51). The directions signify man's range of choice in the immediate phenomenal field. In the final lecture of those comprising Poetry and Truth, Olson introduces a mantra of sorts which he states came to him in dream. The phrases are highly allusive but easily unravelled given his essential presumption of enlightenment by image: "Everything issues from - Everything issues from..., and nothing is anything but itself, measured so" (PT, p.63). The repetition of "issues from" is both spiritual affirmation, and cautious reminder to the Western mind. Form and act emerge from an actual landscape; it is a restatement of the veritas efficaciae which William Dorn saw hidden in matter. For Olson, an object or happening

8. Truth and Life of Myth, p.71.

instantaneously seized, obeys the principle of complementarity. It is both self-contained corpuscle and radiant wave of form. From the single immediate perception, the architectonics of cosmos issue in fulness. The phrase is thus no vapid simplicity; Olson never tires of demonstrating that purely rational thought demeans the physical material which is the origination of all idea and form. His second assertion, "Nothing is anything but itself measured so," recalls the imprint of typos, the specificity of an object cut in stone or contained in syllable. The idea of measurement implies both the direct measure of the eye in perception, and the personal measures of breath in enunciating the truth perceived.

The lecture delivered at Berkeley in 1965, and afterwards published as Causal Mythology, is highly relevant to Olson's concept of a world-picture. In Special View he had ventured his definition of mythology: "What I mean by it is the Kosmos inside a human being..." (p.53), and the Berkeley lecture significantly depicts the earth as a readily assimilated object, the single orb which might be held easily within the mind or body cavity: "The Earth, then, is conceivably a knowable, a seizable, a single, and your thing" (p.5). The italicized personal pronoun stresses the intensely personal seizing which is our incorporation of earth or cosmos. As Olson puts it in Causal Mythology, "...I have arrived at a point where I really have no more than to feed on myself" (p.4). This is by no means the language of despair. On the contrary, Olson's mythic vision is an affirmation of the most vital cosmic powers. The descriptive term "causal" has a dual significance. Olson would doubtless have absorbed Weyl's comment that the whole basis of contemporary physics largely precludes the principle of causation: "... it will be clear how little contemporary physics, based as it is

half on laws and half on statistics, can pose as a champion of determinism" (p.211). Indeed, The Special View of History might be read as an anti-determinist tract, with its emphasis on our uncertain context and its revelation that purpose is contingent, not primordial. The rise to prominence of laws of probability in microphysics resulted in the philosophical questioning of the whole concept of causality.

Lincoln Barnett broaches this problem in his popular work on Einstein:

Quantum physics thus appears to shake two pillars of the old science, causality and determinism. For by dealing in terms of statistics and probabilities it abandons all idea that nature exhibits an inexorable sequence of cause and effect between individual happenings. And by its admission of margins of uncertainty it yields up the ancient hope that science, given the present state and velocity of every material body in the universe, can forecast the history of the universe for all time. 9

As Olson makes clear in Special View, the only determinism now applicable is man's own. He can determine form by the instantaneous act, and is, as Olson puts it, "a conceivable creator" (SV, p.49). Thus the sole area in which we can any longer posit real causation is a man's own mythologizing, his creation of a world image. But for Olson, mythology is equally causal in that the image once created, intensifies the basic ethos. Once we realize the earth as a personally experienced unity, our own thing, we are more inclined to treat it with the respect and care an intimate possession deserves. Olson sees mythology as inextricable from such respect. With his awe of the natural world, primitive man rarely misused material resource, and so Olson perceives the mythological birth of wonder having inevitably ethical ramifications. At the Berkeley lecture he read twice the poem beginning, "7 years & you cld carry cinders in yr hand/for what the country was worth..." (MIII, p.41). When the cosmos is not present in a man, Olson suggests,

9. Lincoln Barnett, The Universe and Dr. Einstein (1948; rpt. New York: Signet Books, 1964), p.34.

this unthinking exploitation of resource is the result. The relation of the form-making act to Olson's philosophy of use thus becomes clearer. Man's formulation of an integral world-picture should inspire the "tender care that nothing be lost." In Special View Olson makes an instructive discrimination between the merely "experientable" and the "knowable" (SV, p.30). The experientable is what stops at the skin surface, the superficial ego of "Proprioception." But the knowable, he specifies, "can be used" (p.30), and if we truly know the earth as an apprehensible orb, we will be inspired to the most delicate possible juggling of resource.

Such intimate knowledge of the world is for Olson largely a visceral process, and in Poetry and Truth he elaborates on the cavity image he had introduced in "Proprioception." We will recall that Erich Neumann sees "the inside of the body [as] archetypally identical with the unconscious, the 'seat' of the psychic processes that for man take place 'in' him and 'in the darkness.'"¹⁰ The agglomeration of archetypes constitutes an internal darkness; we are each invaded by the collective unconscious of mankind according to Jung, and the process of arriving at archetypes expressive of our own "self" is a circuitous and largely ambiguous quest. For Olson, the "darkness" of the body cavity or unconscious, is identical with the endemic condition of uncertainty. As we seek our psychic fulfilment in darkness, so we seek a world-structure through obscurity, and we have seen in "Proprioception" that the achievement of a world-image is synonymous with the achievement of individuation. Thus Olson stresses "that we are darkness. That our... condition inside is dark" (PT, p.43). In "Proprioception" he had emphasized the "placement" of the perceived object in the body cavity, where it could be mythically transmuted to image. He describes

10. Great Mother, p.59.

the transmutation process in Poetry and Truth as a lighting of our interior darkness. And the source of that light is literally the earth herself, the physical matter in which the perceivable universe consists: "But that that literal globe or orb is our lamp or clue to the whole of creation, and that only by obedience to it does one have a chance at heaven" (PT, p.42). Heaven is identified with the attainment of individuation in "Proprioception;" Olson's heaven, sought and lost and found again in the mythic materials of Maximus IV, V, VI, is the mandala of the Golden Flower. As we shall see, these poems demonstrating psychic fulfilment, bear witness to origination in specific events. In Causal Mythology he stresses that all possibility of form is hidden in immediate condition: "I believe there is simply ourselves, and where we are has a particularity which we'd better use because that's about all we got" (p.36).

One of the main aims of the "Proprioception" essay is to establish the image-making process as intensely organic and indeed, visceral. In Causal Mythology Olson continues this idea of an innate transmutation of material, affirming that the capacity to create a world image is instinctual to the human organism: "Again I'm suggesting that even the overt spiritual exercise of initiation is initial in us. We are, we are, spiritual exercise by having been born" (p.15). As we noted above, Olson drew sustenance from the "philosophy of organism," rejoicing in the fact that Whitehead explained the consistency of matter as rooted in organic feeling. If particles of matter bond together because of affective relations, surely man, who is organic by definition, will similarly bond the materials of his world? In "Proprioception" Olson cited the unconscious contents of the cavity as prerequisite to the creation of a self/world image, and by Jung's theory such contents are

organically instinctual. Thus bolstered by Whitehead and Jung, he sees man's urge for order as pervasively democratic. The poetic condition is by necessity every man's, and every man should be naturally capable:

And one can define the present... as the search for order as man himself is the image of same. Whitehead, then, makes sense in proposing a philosophy of organism, exactly how he defines his own system. And the evidence of a new cosmology at present emerging does not have to be limited to him. Jung, for example, in exposing the abundance of mythic materials in the unconscious, goes in a parallel direction. And the re-arising of art to dominance - art was never any more, and can be nothing other than the order of man, specifically man, and not nature... (SV, p.47).

Olson's mythic consciousness also draws on three distinct philosophies, each of which is centred on darkness or ambiguity. Consistent with his eclectic interests, these derive from vastly variant sources. In addition to the speculative musings of John Keats, Olson was inspired by the conceptual structures and imagery of Gnosticism, both in its original form of the first century A.D., and its tenth-century residue in the Ismaili mysticism of the philosopher Avicenna. The image of darkness, therefore, comes layered with associations from the purely gnostic to the Romantic and Keatsian.

Olson saw Keats' "Negative Capability" as visionary insight into man's most basic context of uncertainty. He appropriated Keats' antithesis of the "Man of Achievement" and the "egotistical sublime" for demonstrative purposes in Special View. The "Man of Achievement" abides by Olson's own principle of "allowability." He does not impose his will upon the natural world, but rather remains open to its vivid physicality. He is middle voice, the transitional term in the transformation of energies. The "wordsworthian" or "egotistical sublime," on the other

hand, consistently asserts its own character, levelling and dividing nature according to some preconceived measure. Olson sees Pound as operating from such a guise, and as early as 1951 he had yearned in a letter to Creeley for "a correct methodology, AND WITH THE ALTERNATIVE TO THE EGO-POSITION" (ML, p.29). The capitalization is an index of his repudiation of Pound's treatment of the "actionable," those energies greater than man. Pound's use of them Olson perceived to be pragmatic and misplaced, a stepping-stone to idealism rather than the source of instantaneous process. But the "actionable" in Olson's mythic vision is literally the source of light, and in absorbing that light man is both his own centre and radiant circumference of transmuted energy:

Thus one gets two sorts of will, a will of power or a will of achievement. The first one is the one in which the will collapses back to the subjective understanding - tries to make it by asserting the self as character. The second makes it by non-asserting the self as self. In other words the riddle is that the true self is not the asserting function but an obeying one, that the actionable is larger than the individual and so can be obeyed to...

.....
One is power. The other is achievement. One is the self as ego and sublime. The other is the self as center and circumference (SV, p.45).

We see an obedient function of self in Keats' personal application of Hazlitt's theory of "gusto." The poetic character he describes as readily immersed in the variegations of reality, neither propriety nor ideology interfering with his basic delight in specifics:

As to the poetical character itself... that sort distinguished from the wordsworthian or egotistical sublime... it is not itself - it has no self - it is everything, and nothing - It has no character - it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated - It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen... It does no harm from its relish of the dark side of things any more than from its taste for the bright one; because they both end in speculation. A Poet is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence; because he has no Identity. When I am in a room with People if I am ever free from speculating on

creations of my own brain, then not myself goes home to myself: but the identity of everyone in the room begins to press upon me that, I am in a very little time annihilated - not only among Men; it could be the same in a Nursery of children. 11

Olson translates this passage into his own terminology in Poetry and Truth. Keats' enthusiasm is obviously "typological," and loss of self in typos is the stance essential to the mythic-poetic creation. The reference to the Nursery of children Olson misremembers as a children's party:

I also want to say that in another letter... he speaks of himself... how he lost, how when he came into a room of children - and it was a birthday party he went to ... they took his nature. I mean, they were so typological, that he was in them as the spirit of them... it's a roomful of children. It's like, it's all that Keats thinks of as the whole of the experience of being alive, and he is susceptible, and he believes that in that susceptibility alone is the act that he must now master (PT, p.49).

Keats handles the darkness of the uncertain context by giving himself over to the specificity of nature, the dissolution of the ego-position which Olson urged from "Human Universe" on. But in addition, Olson sees this willingness to remain content with half-knowledge as a recognition of reality in flux. There "is no difference between process and reality..." he proclaims in Special View (p.42), and "to slip into the error of trying to fix things by an irritable reaching after fact and reason..." (p.42), is egotistical interference with the very essence of physis. In falling back on subjective understanding and the irritable fixation of fact, we militate against the cosmic character. Olson thus cautions us against clinging to any single structure we may achieve: "And the only way the Will can be seen to be positive, and thus creative, is when it does not fall back to Understanding, but keeps the verbal force of the Dialectical (change) and thus sits above

11. The Letters of John Keats, I, pp.386-87.

or outside or under, asymmetrical [sic] to both the Power and the Good" (SV, pp.45-46). This idea of man's keeping his will asymmetrical to ideal formulations turns up repeatedly in the cosmogonic poems of Maximus IV, V, VI. We shall see the image of a dynamic force resident "under" the structure of creation in "Maximus, From Dogtown - IV," for example, where Olson celebrates the demonism of Hesiod's Typhon, the monster who sought to overcome the established powers of Zeus.

The second of Olson's probable major sources for the darkness image is in many ways an unlikely one. Gnosticism arose in the first century A.D., a unique syncretism of Christian, Jewish, Babylonian, and Egyptian elements, an end-product, in fact, of the melting-pot of Hellenism. It is not a doctrine with which one would readily associate Olson for it definitely tends toward a denigration of matter, and its most extreme form, Manichaeism, identifies flesh and physical material absolutely with evil. One of Gnosticism's primary characteristics is the concept of a "contra-mundane" God. The universe is believed to be the malignant creation of some Demi-urge, alienated from the divine realm by a primeval fall from grace. Most Gnostic sects, therefore, maintain that God is totally unaware of human existence:

The cardinal feature of gnostic thought is the radical dualism that governs the relation of God and the world, and correspondingly, that of man and world. The deity is absolutely transmundane, its nature alien to that of the universe, which it neither created nor governs and to which it is the complete antithesis: to the divine realm of light, self-contained and remote, the cosmos is opposed as the realm of darkness. 12

Olson may well have been attracted by the concept of an endemic darkness, but in addition, the formula of gnosis or knowledge of God, relates closely to his own mythic vision of individuation. Hans Jonas describes the event of gnosis in the soul as transforming "the knower himself by

12. Hans Jonas, The Gnostic Religion (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), p.142.

making him partake in the divine existence."¹³ For Olson, the working of cosmic structure within the darkness of the body cavity is equivalent to spiritual initiation, and such achievement of a world image is, of course, tantamount to realization of "self." Olson's personal world image is most definitely an instance of the divine - the Golden Flower of Chinese Buddhism - and by such light he simultaneously transforms himself. The Gnostic treatment of darkness, while differing radically from that of Keats, was also to inform Olson's mythic proposals, given the context of uncertainty. Earth was construed by them as the centre of concentric rings, which serve to separate man from God:

The universe... is like a vast prison whose innermost dungeon is the earth, the scene of man's life. Around and above it the cosmic spheres are arranged like concentric shells. Most frequently there are the seven spheres of the planets surrounded by the eighth, that of the fixed stars... the vastness and multiplicity of the cosmic system express the degree to which man is removed from God. 14

The seeking of divine assurance through the darkness of the cosmic spheres is Olson's search for order in a shifting frame of reference. Significantly, the Gnostic term "aeon" encompassing the demonic darkness in its entirety, has both temporal and spatial implications. The seemingly unconquerable distance from God is, in fact, a space-time continuum, and as Jonas explains, "through all of them [the aeons] representing so many degrees of separation from the light, 'Life' must pass in order to get out."¹⁵ The apprehension of the divine, therefore, hinges on the soul's successful traversing of the "aeons," the enormity of space-time. And it is this painstaking travail through the continuum of our own existence that Olson posits as prerequisite to

13. Jonas, p.35.

14. Jonas, p.43.

15. Jonas, p.52.

mythic epiphany. The Gnostics laboured through the darkness of the aeons toward light, and it is perhaps for this reason that Olson designated the first century A.D. as characterized by "a sense of the divine" (AP, p.26). Only by a like absorptive awareness at each set of our co-ordinates, will we achieve the internalization of cosmos from which emanates the divine.

Olson provides a demonstration of such a productive traversing of space-time in his horizontal delineation of the achievement of Captain William Ellery, a seventeenth-century Gloucester ship-owner:

B. Ellery Cinvat Bridge aer (MII, p.47)

The Zoroastrian image of the Cinvat Bridge effectively depicts the accomplished arc of a life's intense awareness and productive acts. An earlier poem, "The Account Book of B.Ellery," is a catalogue of the main elements comprising Ellery's existence. By proper use of the following resources and commercial materials, Ellery achieved the spiritual rarefaction of aer:

vessels
goods
voyages
persons
salaries
conveyances (MII, p.34)

According to Gaskell's Dictionary of All Sacred Scriptures and Myth, the Cinvat Bridge separates Heaven and Hell, and along it "the souls of the pious alone can pass, while the wicked fall from it into hell."¹⁶ But for Olson it is representative of a man's life-line traced through the mesh of the continuum. That he selects the life-line of Captain William Ellery indicates the extent of applicability of his mythic vision, for Ellery was a practical sea-captain, surviving by financial

16. G.A. Gaskell, A Dictionary of All Sacred Scriptures and Myth (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1923), p.128.

investment in his southern voyages. For Olson, who had sounded Ellery's history by documental investigation, it is a life exemplifying the most equitable use of resource and capital. He includes in Maximus IV, V, VI, a contract entered into by Ellery and other Gloucester ship-owners in which they agree to share their losses (p.200). Such fair distribution Olson sees as indicative of Ellery's whole stance, and the internalization of cosmos is thus revealed as translatable into exemplary commercial activity. He implies that for Ellery, the mythological stance was implicit in his own life's order. He concludes his own prose rendering of the ship-owners' contract with the signature and place of signing, "B Ellery Dog Town." This run-on line suggests an equivalence or identity, Ellery being inextricable from his home-ground of Dogtown, an original area of settlement in Gloucester. As we shall see, Dogtown is Olson's own mythic resource, the particular landscape of Gloucester which he is able to transmute to the Golden Flower. Ellery's identity with Dogtown implicates him in Olson's own mythic vision; indeed, Olson regards his assertive individual acts as a perfect world-ordering. It is a traversing of space-time, he suggests, from whose example any man might benefit.

The third mode of darkness imagery which Olson was also to incorporate into his schema, is found in the visionary recital of the tenth-century philosopher Avicenna. Olson had by 1965 studied intensely Henri Corbin's commentary on Avicenna's mystical tracts. The Avicennan system, describing a cosmos based on an angelic hierarchy, bears some resemblance to Gnostic alienation, but importantly it posits the existence of a compassionate helpmate; to each human soul there corresponds an angel who speeds it through the travails of darkness toward the light. Like the Gnostics, Avicenna envisions the earth as

a place of confinement. Corbin states that he saw "this world as a crypt. Above the earth heaven curves like a dome, enclosing it, giving it the safety of a habitude, but at the same time keeping it as it were in a prison."¹⁷ The soul of man is seen to be in exile, and it must penetrate various edifices of darkness in order to reach the ineffable Creator.

Where Olson seems most to have drawn on Avicennan doctrine, is the concept of interiorization of cosmos. Man's assimilation of his world is cited as first step in his spiritual ascent:

It is only upon the condition of being thus reconquered as a world living in the soul, and as no longer a world into which the soul is cast as a prisoner because it has not acquired consciousness of it, that this spiritual cosmos will cease to shatter into fragments at the contact of material or ideological advances fed from other sources. 18

Olson had defined mythology as "the kosmos inside the human being" as early as 1956, and certainly "Proprioception" centres on the notion of placement inside the body cavity. He copes with the darkness of cosmos, therefore, much as did Avicenna. There are similarities as well, in that Avicenna sees the internalization of the world as contingent on man's journey to its utmost limits. This recalls Olson's methodology of completeness of attention, the immaculate absorption of the particularities inherent in space-time. However, where Olson sees the traversing of earth as itself the source of the angelic personage and the imago mundi, the journey is for Avicenna an exodus from the physical world:

17. H. Corbin, Avicenna and the Visionary Recital, trans. W.R. Trask (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), pp.17-18. Olson first refers to this text in Causal Mythology (1965). It is possible that he became interested in Avicenna after reading Jung's Psychology and Alchemy, in which the Arabic philosopher is mentioned.

18. Corbin, p.15.

The event of the Avicennan... recital was exodus from this world, the encounter with the Angel, and with the world of the Angel... For the Event carries us to the utmost limit of the world; at this limit, the cosmos yields before the soul, it can no longer escape being interiorized into the soul, being integrated with it. This is the phase at which the psychic energy performs the transmutation of the text - here that of the "cosmic text" - into a constellation of symbols. What the soul suddenly visualizes is its own archetypal Image... 19

Thus Corbin interprets Avicenna's interiorization of cosmos as identical with the discovery of an image of "self." Olson's major divergence from Avicennan speculation is obvious: Corbin explains that the Avicennan Image "precedes all perception,"²⁰ whereas Olson's is actually rooted in visual perception; but despite this primary inconsistency, his conjectures on the mythic process follow closely the Avicennan scheme.

The appearance of the Avicennan angel complements the internalization of the world image, and similarly throughout Maximus IV, V, VI, personae of various mythologies, including those of Olson's own personal history, appear concomitant with the structuring of the Golden Flower. Corbin explains of Avicenna that the "philosophical readiness to conceive the universe and intelligible essences... complemented by an imaginative ability to visualize concrete figures, to encounter 'persons';"²¹ and Olson's conception of the world is accompanied in the poems, by real encounters with his literal parents, as well as with the Virgin Mary, and the Hesiodic progenitors of the Olympian gods. The Avicennan image is notably an idiosyncratic creation, attesting to the character of its maker. We have frequently noted Olson's stress on the specificity of disposition and location; Corbin's declaration that

19. Corbin, p.32.

20. Corbin, p.7.

21. Corbin, p.7.

Avicenna posits "an individual vision, expressible and communicable only through an individual symbolism, the symbol of your own individuality,"²² directly underlines his sense of ontogenetic creativity. In addition, Avicennan mysticism corroborates Olson's sense that man is capable of producing an image which illuminates the cosmos in its entirety: "the Image is not so much the object of vision, as the organ of vision; it is what shows the soul, enables it to see, the cosmos in which it is, and simultaneously what the soul is in this cosmos and what it is in itself."²³

In the poem "Maximus, at the Harbour," Olson synthesizes various materials of the Avicennan schema, but with remarkable qualifications. We see "Paradise" in the configuration of a person, and so Olson's own heaven evolves from his engagement with the World Parents.²⁴ He tellingly inverts the sense of the Avicennan phrase, "come into this world" so that it fits his own cosmology. Corbin notes that the phrase originates in a treatise by Nasir Tusi, one of Avicenna's commentators: "To come into this world"²⁵ was the Avicennan affirmation of the spiritual realm; it signified the loosening of earthly fetters, the repudiation of the concrete world in favour of the angels. But the actual orb of earth is the only "true world" for Olson, and thus his visionary paradise manifests itself on various promontories of the Gloucester coast-line:

Paradise is a person. Come into this world.
The soul is a magnificent Angel.
And the thought of its thought is the rage
of Ocean apophainesthai

22. Corbin, p.33.

23. Corbin, p.80.

24. This is discussed in detail in the following chapter.

25. Corbin, p.27.

roared the great bone on to Norman's
 Woe; apophainesthai, as it blew
 up a pool on Round Rock shoal;
apophainesthai it cracked as it broke
 on Pavilion Beach apophainesthai
 it tore at Watch House Point (MII, pp.70-71).

Paradise emerges from the actual crash of ocean's waves on the jugged landscape of Gloucester. The roar is the aural embodiment of Okeanos, in Hesiod's Theogony the circle of waters which wraps around earth nine times. The immediate perceptual act Olson transmutes into an image of cosmogonic power; this internalization of earth is Paradise for Olson. "The thought of its thought" is another concept which Olson reworks to suit his supreme valuation of physis and man's originaive potential. Corbin points out that in Avicennan cosmology, "the first caused is precisely the Thought eternally thought by the thought that thinks itself..."²⁶ But for Olson, this amounts to a divine solipsism from which man is absolutely excluded. We will recall that in Special View, he defines God as "the act of taking thought," and it is, in fact, man's hunger for order which makes manifest both God and world-structure. Thus Olson's primal causation can be understood quite simply as "the thought" of the soul. But "the thought" of the soul's thought is "the rage of Ocean" according to Olson, and it is essential here to realize that Okeanos is the primeval uroboros, the symbol of the perfect whole, often depicted as a snake biting its own tail. Erich Neumann describes it as "'the Great Round', in which positive and negative, male and female, elements hostile to consciousness, and unconscious elements are intermingled. In this sense the uroboros is also a symbol of the state in which chaos, the unconscious, and the psyche as a whole were undifferentiated."²⁷ Thus we can think of Okeanos as the disorganized

26. Corbin, p.57.

27. Great Mother, p.18.

repository of man's unconscious contents, the compiled archetypes of the collective unconscious. Olson suggests such an interpretation in the first of the "Dogtown" poems: "... Okeanos the one which all things are and by which nothing/is anything but itself, measured so" (MII, p.2). Okeanos is also the repository of all typos, therefore. Wrapping in the consistency of earth, the uroboros contains all things by implication: "deep-swirling Okeanos steers all things through all things/ everything issues from the one..." (p.2). Thus "the thought" of the soul's thought, which is "the roar of ocean," is the accumulation of archetypes harboured or "thought" by the generations of mankind. Ocean is the store house of instinctual image from which the individual soul draws. And this idiosyncratic nature of thought brings us to apophainesthai, a Greek verb conjugated in the middle voice, and meaning "to reveal oneself" or "show oneself forth." The term arises in Corbin's discussion of Nasir Tusi's Paradise, and is thus directly applicable to Avicenna. Like his mentor, Nasir Tusi emphasized the highly individual nature of the cosmic image. As Corbin makes clear, "it is not a story that happened to others, but the soul's own story, its 'spiritual romance'... personally lived: the soul can only tell it in the first person."²⁸ And in telling the story there is necessarily a reflection on the self: the interiorization of the world image inevitably results in the agent's psychic metamorphosis. The soul is revealed to itself transfigured in a radiant totality.

For Olson, this self-transformation in the light of the divine is the act which man must rediscover. He maintains that we have been estranged from the wonders implicit in imaginative transmutation of matter: "apophainesthai/got hidden all the years" (MII, p.71). It

28. Corbin, p.33.

is Corbin who points out that the Image enables man to see the relation of his individual soul to cosmos, and for Olson such relation is most fittingly expressed by the middle voice. Our visceral absorption of the world intensifies our awareness that it is all-sustaining, and that man is a transitional term. In "Maximus, at the Harbour," Olson plays upon the Avicennan "event" or act of the soul, which is its progressive rise toward the limits of the world. We know that Olson holds a man's acts, whether perceptual or imaginative, to be initiatory of world-order, and the act of the Avicennan soul is likewise an illumination of structure, the angel preceding as herald: "The soul performs its action and understands it only beginning with the act which actuates the soul itself. For its action is then its own form, which it sends out in advance of itself as its herald, and which is the image of the Angel..."²⁹ Olson had asserted in "Human Universe," "there is only one thing you can do about kinetic, re-enact it" (HU, p.10), and by such immediate transmutation of cosmic energies, he suggests, the world-image will manifest itself, together with Angel and reflexive illumination:

apophainesthai
got hidden all the years
apophainesthai: the soul,
in its progressive rise

apophainesthai
passes in & out
of more difficult things
and by so passing
apophainesthai

the act which actuates the soul itself -
she loomed before me and he stood
in the room - it sends out
on the path ahead the Angel
it will meet

apophainesthai

its accent is its own mirage (MII, p.71)

29. H. Corbin, "Cyclical Time in Mazdaism and Ismailism," in Man and Time: Papers From the Eranos Yearbooks, trans. Ralph Manheim (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul), XXX, 3, p.167.

In the punning of this section's last line Olson draws attention to the nature of his own primary acts: his medium is the actual language of poets. "Mirage" plays upon the Arabic mi'raj, the ascent of the soul, and the dual significance of "accent" thus becomes apparent. The line can therefore be read either as a tautology: "its ascent is its own mi'raj" or as Olson's commentary on the character of his own transfigurative acts. It is the very accentuation of image, the stressed articulations of breath, which actuate the soul in its progressive rise. He shows the power of such aural construction in one of the later poems included in the third Maximus volume:

flower of the underworld

to build out of sound the walls of the city
in one flower the underworld so that, & display

by such means the unique
 stand forth clear itself
shall be made known (MIII, p.194)

Olson's "event" is thus the verbalization of an integrally realized cosmos, but he might equally have achieved self-transfiguration by practising the balanced economies of a Captain William Ellery. In "Maximus, at the Harbor," he describes the soul as passing "in & out/ of more difficult things;" Olson sees man's ordering of the world as a most exacting task given the multitudinous stimuli in the phenomenal field, and the shifting ground of relativity. In Poetry and Truth he introduced the audience to the Avicennan ta'wil, a concept perfectly descriptive of his own mythic process (p.63). Corbin describes the ta'wil as "the exegesis that leads the soul back to its truth... transmutes all cosmic realities and restores them to symbols; each becomes an event of the soul, which, in its ascent, its Mi'raj, passes beyond them and makes them interior to itself."³⁰ With the careful substitution of image for symbol, Olson's mythic procedure is seen to

30. Corbin, p.34.

be such an exegesis. Indeed Maximus IV, V, VI records his own ta'wil, the interiorization and mythic transmutation of the landscape, objects, and historical events of Gloucester he had so meticulously documented in the first Maximus volume. The early Maximus poems demonstrate the power of fixed attention, the poems of the second volume the methodology of realizing the divine through matter. As Corbin later clarifies, the literal meaning of ta'wil is "to lead back to the origin,"³¹ and the primal origination of cosmos is, in fact, the end-product of Olson's own mythic exegesis.

But unlike Avicenna and the Gnostics, Olson revitalizes the cosmic image by a constant return to the originative material. The very essence of his mythology is the re-investment of energies in the phenomenal world: the image is interiorized so that it can be used, a productive validation of the "tender care" for matter. Revealingly, Olson's subtitle for the lectures Poetry and Truth, is "The Dogmatic Nature of Experience" (PT, p.11), and his particular reading of the adjective he clarifies in the body of the lectures: "... the experience of image or vision is as simple as that. It's simply an entrance into our own self of ... our dogmatic conditions... which we inherit by being alive and acquire by seeking to be alive..." (PT, p.44). By the very fact of life, our organisms are necessarily placed in some particular situ, and it is the urgency of the conscious organism that it seek life by making a judgement on its surroundings. Our dogmatic conditions thus comprise the specificity of landscape (perceivable objects and events), and the specificity of individual judgement (born of disposition and relative position). Given the ground structure of relativity, these conditions will satisfy no fixed equation: even should we maintain a static posture, the scene we perceive will inevitably change second

31. Corbin, p.149.

by second, if only because of apparently simple permutations in its light and shade. Again and again, Olson publicizes the necessity that we each structure our own world by judgement and mythic transmutation. As Weyl puts it, "Only to the gaze of my consciousness, crawling upward along the life line of my body, does a section of the world come to life as a fleeting image in space which continuously changes in time" (p.116). The inescapability of change and relativity reinforces Olson's instinctual concentration on the smallest possible segments of space-time. Obviously we are limited by the speed of the human eye, and within the split second of perceptual certainty, only a small portion of the phenomenal field can be effectively grasped. But by Olson's irradiating image, a total construct can be brought into being. In a poem included in the third volume, he instructs the nation in the benefits of immediate attention:

I am a ward
and precinct
man myself and hate
universalization, believe
it only feeds into a class of deteriorated
personal lives anyway, giving them
what they can buy, a cheap
belief... (MIII, p.11)

This is a variation on Olson's primary theme: the psychic debilitation which results when particularity is glossed over. In forsaking our specific conditions, we abandon the source of our own instantaneous dogma, and succumb to the "cheap belief" of universalization. By perceptual placement we are able to posit a belief, and only through such "dogmatism" can we generate an imago mundi. Perhaps not even the force of Olson's personality can completely overcome the perjorative connotations of the "dogmatic:" the entrenched tenets of some ante-diluvian corpus. But Olson's dogma totally transcends the notion of

rigidity. With his drive to discover the etymological root, we can assume that he was aware of the word's origination. In Preface to Plato, for example, a work which Olson had reviewed in 1963, Eric Havelock discusses the implications latent in the Greek verb doko. Olson, in fact, makes reference to Havelock's work during the Poetry and Truth lectures, although he does not mention the "dogma" passage itself. Havelock stresses the ambiguities of the subjective and objective aspects contained in the word:

... δοξα or opinion: it is this word that, precisely because of its very ambiguities, was chosen not only by Plato but by some of his predecessors to crystallize those properties of the poeticized experience from which the intellectuals were trying to escape. Both the noun, and the verb δοκο, are truly baffling to modern logic in their coverage of both the subjective and objective relationship. The verb denotes both the "seeming" that goes on in myself, the "subjective," namely my "personal impressions," and the "seeming" that links me as an "object" to other people looking at me - the "impression" I make on them. The noun correspondingly is both the "impressions" that may be in my mind and the "impressions" held by others of me. It would appear therefore to be the ideal term to describe that fusion or confusion of the subjective with the objective that occurred in the poeticized performance and in the state of mind created by the performance. 32

But contemporary physics does endorse such a subjective fusion with the object(ive), both in the relativity of space-time and micro-physical experimentation. Plato's stark objectivity can no longer be a valid expectation for human kind. "Seeming" or "appearance" is validated as absolute condition in the very postulates of Einstein's "Special Theory of Relativity." By mouth, we can speak only what "seems" to us to be true: it is a question of belief, or indeed, of dogma. As Robert Creeley puts it: "It is impossible to write anything lacking this relation of its content to oneself. Put another way: things have to come in before they can go out."³³ In a letter

32. E. Havelock, Preface to Plato (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963), pp. 250-51.

33. A Sense of Measure, p. 18.

written in 1953 to Cid Corman, Olson had expressed the subjective-objective fusion by verbal compression: "Because the content is no objective thing. It is hisself, hisown experience."³⁴ "I don't believe that everyone of us isn't absolutely specific. And has his specificity," he declares in Causal Mythology (p.37), and such specificity will necessarily modify the picture we grasp. It is interesting that doko embraces the "impression" which we make upon others, our own typos, in fact. For Olson, our own dogmatic conditions inevitably reflect on the achievement of self-hood, and with regard to individuation, another distinct interpretation of "dogma" which he would doubtless have encountered, is that of C.G. Jung. In Aion, Jung laments the secondary connotations of the word, and affirms its mystical import: "The word 'dogma' has... acquired a somewhat unpleasant sound and frequently serves merely to emphasize the rigidity of a prejudice. For most people living in the West, it has lost its meaning as a symbol for a virtually unknowable and yet 'actual' - ie., operative - fact."³⁵ Olson's imago mundi contains the "virtually unknowable," the universe in its entirety, and yet it is "operant fact" in its inspiration of reverential care for resource.

Olson sought to demonstrate that the mythic vision might emerge from the most basic of our dogmatic conditions, the geological strata comprising our physical landscape, for example. He wrote to his friend Joyce Benson: "Look: it's the Mythological (Cosmological which I'm saying every rock and paleo wind direction in Devonian sand is worth every previous image (or thought)..."³⁶ The fusion of our living organism with inorganic material might explode into the flower of the

34. "Letter to Corman - May 30," Origin, 20 (Jan. 1971), p.45.

35. Aion, p.175.

36. Joyce Benson, "First Round of Letters," Boundary, II, 2, p.360.

world. In "I am the Gold Machine," Olson demonstrates that mythic transformation is possible with the most resistant and apparently uninspiring material. Gloucester was intrinsically his dogmatic condition, and his life's aim was to compress the whole of the city into the tightness of the mandala/flower. In Stage Fort, however, the area of Gloucester in which he was brought up, he encounters a stretch of land which repels his efforts at mythic assimilation. Olson was thoroughly familiar with Jung's psychological interpretation of alchemy, and readily absorbed the theory that the search for the philosopher's stone was in actuality a quest for man's spiritual integration. Jung points out that the alchemical philosopher William Dorn, for example, drew "a complete parallel between the alchemical work and the moral-intellectual transformation of man."³⁷ Thus Olson depicts himself as an alchemical vessel in the poem, a "gold machine" able to convert the prima materia to the gold of the realized image. But in addition, he compounds the alchemical image with that of his own physical body: the alembic is necessarily nervous and visceral, as we saw in "Proprioception." Olson thus envisions the very length of his body as participant in the mythic recasting of the ground:

I am the Gold Machine and now I have trenched out, smeared, occupied with my elongated length the ugliest passage of all the V running from the Rest House down to the Tennis Court, the uncontaminated land which of all Stage Fort does not bend or warp into new expressions of itself as De Sitter imagined the Universe a rubber face or elastic bands falling into emergent lines... (MII, p.131)

He desires a yielding plasticity of the landscape, the malleability which allows its merging with the fluidity of the archetypal contents. Such elasticity is the cosmological prediction of the astronomer De Sitter who created a simple model for the generalized theory that our

37. Psychology and Alchemy, p.248.

universe is constantly expanding, all the galactic systems receding from each other in a seemingly rubberized outgrowth of the whole. Olson makes inroads on the unco-operative land of Stage Fort by drawing his body along its length, absorbing whatever particularity it may contain. Having exerted his sensory receptivity to the utmost, he embarks on the next stage in the mythic transmogrification: the natural making of the image. What he achieves is a construct which fits exactly the slot in the door of the Rest House, his particular vantage-point on Stage Fort. Significantly, the space in the door into which the block-image can be perfectly inserted, is his visual opening on the scene:

Through the grate in a door of a cell
 inside which about where the Rest House is another man
 and I were I had then in my hand a wooden page or block
 with tissue covering its face in which two jewels one
 of which a long red drop and I wished
 so strongly to show right away to Robert Duncan
 and another who were walking away down the V and shot it
 into the space of the door which it exactly fitted
 and they turned, and saw it, and went on and taking
 the block out of the window stuck my fingers vertically
 through the same hole or grating and waved by moving
 my fingers at them when they were towards the Tennis Court

The land was relieved. I had drawn my length all this way
 and had covered this place too.

The image is exact to fact, its typographical block precise to the measure of Olson's visual perception. The jewel which is "a long red drop" might well signify the part played by his own blood, both in essential organic awareness, and the articulations of speech. Despite the initial recalcitrance of the landscape, he is able to formulate its mythic image successfully, so successfully that it becomes an image of individuation. Having sent forth the image block into the space of other minds, he is able to wave his fingers at Robert Duncan and his companion, and is thereby recognized. "The land was relieved," as is Olson himself, for the flower of Gloucester demands the inclusion of the city's every centimetre. Indeed, Olson felt called upon to

integrate the most distasteful of the city's aspects into the achieved imago. Thus the poem entitled "Part of the Flower of Gloucester" incorporates even the stench of the polluted harbour waters into the mandala:

Part of the Flower of Gloucester

from the sunsets
to the rubbish on the Harbor bottom
fermenting so bubbles
of the gas formed from the putrefaction
keep coming up and you watch them break
on the surface and imagine the odor
which is true
at low-tide that you can't stand the smell
if you live with Harbor Cove or the Inner
Harbor to your side (MLI, p.127)

Toward the end of his life, Olson was to posit his methodology of world-image as the potential salvation of mankind. In an interview of August, 1969, he was questioned about the future of Gloucester and replied confidently that the city would be "an image of creation and of human life for the rest of the life of the species."³⁸ Maximus IV, V, VI is Olson's detailed explication of the process by which a world image is achieved: he trusted that other men would effectively apply the methodology for "an image of creation." The interview also reveals why Olson believed Gloucester to be particularly suited as a primary exemplar of such creation. He uses the arguments of the geographer V. Stefansson to substantiate that Gloucester was the shore on which culminated the migrations of mankind:

38. "I know men for whom everything matters: Charles Olson in conversation with H.A. Kenny," The Journal of the Charles Olson Archives, 1 (Spring 1974), p.19.

... Or take Stefansson: that the notion of man upon the earth has a line, an oblique, northwest-tending line, and Gloucester was the last shore in that sense. The fact that the continent and the series of such developments as have followed, have occupied three hundred and some-odd years, doesn't take away that primacy or originatory nature that I'm speaking of. I think it's a very important fact... So that the last polis or city is Gloucester. Therefore I think that in a sense we're - man now is either going to rediscover the earth or is going to leave it. Whichever way you read it. Then Gloucester becomes the flower in the pure Buddhist sense of being the place to be picked. Right? 39

For Olson, man's mythic "reading" of his world, his exegesis on its physical objects, would guarantee both his bodily and spiritual survival on earth. "How do you, as a person, not only as a poet, does one live one's own image, rather than use it simply for writing...?" he had questioned (PT, pp.33-34), and the resolution of the proposition is the resolution of the fate of the human species. He had himself seen the faces of Gloucestermen transfigured: the fishermen who rose at dawn, for example, appeared "washed as gods in the Basin of Morning" (MIII, p.175). In "The Festival Aspect" Olson draws us again to the origination of mythic image in the vector of complete perceptual attention. The lotus is held aloft by a man's five fingers, the prehension of body and mind:

... The truth

is fingers holding it all up
underneath, the Lotus
is a cusp, and its stalk
holds up it all.
It isn't even a burning point, it is a bow
of fingers shooting
a single arrow... (MII, p.73)

But the arrow of fiery attention, and the ultimate exfoliation of the flower, are purchased at a high price, at least for Olson, who takes upon himself the task of the perfect demonstration. The strictly

personal losses attendant on his immaculate mythic conception, and the efforts to publicize his method, comprise a major theme in the poetry of the third volume. He experiences the isolation of the archetypal spiritual mentor; he sits alone in the padma, the calyx of the flower he had created:

Only my written word

I've sacrificed every thing, including sex and women
- or lost them - to this attempt to acquire complete
concentration. (The con-
ventual.) "robe and bread"
not worry or have to worry about
either

Half Moon beach ("the arms of her")
my balls rich as Buddha's
sitting in her like the Padma
- and Gloucester, foreshortened
in front of me. It is not I,
even if the life appeared
biographical. The only interesting thing
is if one can be
an image
of man, "The nobleness, and the arete" (MIII, p.101).

Given the inescapable fact that "the condition is the penetralium," Olson urged that each man will his own world into being. The will is "the innate voluntarism of to live" he clarified in Special View (p.44), and thus each man's world-structure might instinctually emerge, were he awakened to his innate proprioceptive capacities. Amongst physicists and scientific philosophers themselves, the human will has assumed a new significance given the context of experimental uncertainty. Lincoln Barnett summarizes this kind of speculation: "For if physical events are indeterminate and the future is unpredictable, then perhaps the unknown quantity called 'mind' may yet guide man's destiny among the infinite uncertainties of a capricious universe."⁴⁰ In his final appendix to Philosophy of Mathematics and Natural Science, Weyl

40. The Universe and Dr. Einstein, p.35.

discusses certain theories of evolution which posit the human will as the organizing factor amidst the random play of genetic accident. He quotes the biologist, J.C. Willis, for example:

The process of evolution appears not to be a matter of natural selection of chance variations of adaptational value. Rather it is working upon some definite law that we do not yet comprehend. The law probably began its operations with the commencement of life, and it is carrying this on according to some definite plan (p.300).

Olson would certainly be familiar with this section of Weyl's book, since it is from this appendix that he draws the term "autocatalytic multiplication." As Weyl points out, the speculation about the origins of life is as open as is the speculation about the ultimate consistency of matter. As well, he goes on to posit a definite correlation between the will of man and the seemingly spontaneous production of spiritual images, an equation which Olson doubtless seized on as endorsement of his own "will to achievement:"

Whether or not the view is tenable that the organizing power of life establishes correlations between independent individual atomic processes, there is no doubt that wherever thought and the causative agent of will emerge, especially in man, that power is increasingly controlled by a purely spiritual world of images... (p.300)

Indeed, the very last lines of Weyl's work urge man to dwell on his interiority, the one aspect of life about which he can be reasonably certain:

As things stand now, the positing of transcendental creative agents possessing the nature of ideas, whether philosophically dangerous or desirable, is of no help in solving the actual concrete problems of biology. And it is a fact that... we know nothing of them, at least not in the same manner in which, by interpretative understanding from within, we know of the thoughts and impulses of ourselves and our fellow beings (pp.300-301).

Olson had very early come to this conclusion, asserting that he had "no more to feed on than himself." And by "interpretative understanding from within" he was convinced, any man might create not just an integral world-structure, but one flooded by spiritual light:

I believe in religion not magic or science I believe in society as religious both man and society as religious (MIII, p.55).

Chapter Six

The Flower of Dogtown - Mythic Process in Maximus Poems IV, V, VI

In volume III of the Maximus poems, Olson cites Dogtown explicitly as the "rune of the/Nation" (p.129). He might equally have written world, for he did attempt in his own mythic treatment of Dogtown, a perfect specimen for the emulation of mankind. In his "Annotated Guide," George Butterick describes Dogtown as "an uncultivated section of Gloucester, strewn with glacial deposits, in the central part of Cape Ann..." (p.18). It was perhaps the fact that it was a landscape left largely untouched, which initially attracted Olson. It was raw material for the gold machine of his mind, and the glacial deposits themselves draw attention to the land's actual physical development throughout the aeons. "Kame" is a recurring image in the first and second volumes of Maximus,¹ the sedimentary deposits being instances of Whitehead's "objective immortality." The activity of long past glacial run-off endures in the mounds which distinguish the physiography of Dogtown, and the observer is always confronted by the very real contribution of past event. Because man has as yet interfered but little with its ecology, Dogtown remains a largely pure outgrowth of nature's own process, and in drawing its landscape through the cycles of his mythologizing Olson takes on physis in one of her truest conditions. Dogtown proper is the setting for three of the major poems included in Maximus IV, V, VI, each of which is an exploration of cosmogony, and man's relation to physis. Each of these poems, "Maximus, From Dogtown - I," "II," and "IV," will be examined in detail, particular attention being given to the body of imagery which forms a weft through the whole of Olson's poetry. The mythic dramas which he envisions on Dogtown

1. See MI, p.150 and MII, p.149, p.151.

Common give him a basis in certainty, from which to draw the rest of Gloucester into the unity of the imago mundi. Approximately two years before his death, he was able to celebrate the Gloucester landscape in its entirety, as containing "all possible combinations of/Creation..." (MIII, p.188). Peninsula, hills, and sea yield mythic, as well as perceptual insight:

That's
the combination the ocean
out one window rolling
100 yards from me, the City
out the door on the next quarter up a hill was a dune
300 years covered very little so that, a few years back
a street crew were and I picked up the white
sand

On my back the
Harbor and over it the long arm'd shield of Eastern
point. Wherever I turn or look in whatever direction,
and near me, on any quarter, all possible combinations of
Creation even now early year Mars blowing
crazy lights at night and as I write in the day light snow
covering the water and crossing the air between me and
the City. Love the World - and stay inside it (MIII, p.188).

Indeed, the goal is always to experience the world as personally assimilable, the orb cherished within the darkness of the body cavity. So Whitehead saw in each creative act, "the universe incarnating itself as one....,"² and Olson's creative act must specifically be verbal and poetic. Thus in volumes II and III of Maximus he strives to bind in all the threads of Gloucester, continuing his voracious investigation of historical document, for example; we will recall that in Special View he determines that there are but two ways "to get the density" of what happened (p.19). The first of these is the Herodotean 'istorin, and the second the imaginative feat of "making up." Our sudden experience of the world as unity through mythic consciousness, obviously cannot be explained by an accumulation of fact. It is too mixed with the blood

2. Process and Reality, p.287.

and viscera of the originator to be exposed to scrutiny. Significantly, in the essay "Proprioception," Olson avoids mention of the mechanics of perception and visceral response; he refers to neither synapse nor engram, but accepts the proprioceptive process as at root, a mystery. He therefore "makes up" his singular interpretation of the object-to-image metamorphosis, supplying each of us with a swirling Okeanos in the body cavity. His instinctual apprehension of the world bears resemblance to Wordsworth's "sensations sweet,/Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart." To experience the cosmos as densely knit from Gloucester outward and back, is to reach spontaneously for its mythic depiction. And the awe of mankind is stored for all time in the archetypes which Jung believes we bear by instinct. Thus Olson can "make up" the vision he experiences, drawing on mythic contents by virtue of his humanity. On the other hand, the practical acts of men, and the events comprising Gloucester history can be directly investigated to a far greater degree. In volume III, for example, Olson reveals more of what he had uncovered regarding Gloucester's first carpenter William Stevens (See "Stevens' Song" pp.30-31), mentioned only as the "first Maximus" of Gloucester in volume I. The very stories he has heard present themselves to him as exigencies, and he endeavours to be all-comprehensive. In a poem entitled simply "Monday, November 26th, 1962," he alludes to the amazing survival of a Gloucester seaman who had apparently been shipwrecked. The character introduces himself, seemingly demanding inclusion:

and his nibs crawled up
and sitting on Piper's Rocks
with a crown on his head

and looking at me with a silly grin
 on his face: I had left him out
 of my monuments around the town (MII, p.140)

We have seen, moreover, that Olson is most punctilious in his efforts to establish the exact geographical locations of each of the early settlers, and beginning with "Letter, May 2, 1959" in volume I, which paces out property boundaries typographically on the page, the theme of human positioning continues an important one throughout the Maximus. "Thurs Sept 14th 1961" records the first known European births in Gloucester, and having passed on this information, Olson concludes with a sense of achievement:

One has then
 a placement:
 a man, & family,
 was on the River,
 just above the Cut,
 by 1635. And for
 10 years... (MII, p.59)

Each centimetre of Gloucester is necessarily imbued with the spirit of the people who have dwelt upon it, and Olson's insistence on "placement" is thus no gratuitous speculation. The theme is carried on into volume III: "17th Century within my eye & on my skin as/in my mind and, in fact and in fact belief I/write and map for you each lot..." (p.135). Throughout his poetic career, therefore, Olson persisted in his study of Gloucester by the only two methodologies he thought possible: the painstaking research of document, and word of mouth, and the imaginative transmutation of the visible. "The trouble is, it is very difficult, to be both a poet and, an historian," he had lamented to Robert Creeley in 1953 (ML, p.91), but in the second and third volumes of Maximus, he tries valiantly to meld the two roles.

As was mentioned in the previous chapter, Maximus IV, V, VI is remarkable in that it does trace through the entire individuation process in Jungian terms. From man's initial state of total unconsciousness to the sublime achievement of the mandala or self, Olson plots each step, drawing always on his own instinctual imagery - personal and mythic - as well as the malleable physiography of Dogtown. Since the entire volume is, in effect, a mapping of psychic process, it would be incomplete without some reference to the body, the primary agency in perception and the process of image. It was perhaps for this reason that "Letter 27" was withheld from the first volume of Maximus, so that its Whiteheadian tenor might make clear the crucial unity of body and soul. The poem concludes, we will recall, with the actual deflection of Gloucester's space, once it meets the body of the poet, the landscape transformed into a smooth arc of mythic realization. Indeed, Whitehead himself saw body and soul as inextricable in terms of human experience:

The truth is that the brain is continuous with the body, and the body continuous with the... natural world. Human experience is an act of self-origination including the whole of nature, limited to a focal region, located within the body, but not necessarily persisting in any fixed co-ordination with a definite part of the brain. 3

Like Jung's pupil, Erich Neumann, Whitehead identifies absolutely the integration of world with the integration of self, and it is essential in examining Maximus IV, V, VI as a whole, that this equation be kept always in mind. The vision of the Golden Flower is both the poet's perfect exfoliation of self-hood, and his certain grasp of the world as a single orb. "Letter 27" is included very early in the volume, almost directly following on "Maximus, from Dogtown - I" and "II," mythic depictions of the initial potency of the unconscious, and the struggle to self-hood, respectively.

We are aware of Olson's argument that one's immediate conditions are dogmatic, and wielding his body as instrument, he absorbs all that Gloucester can offer. This includes naturally enough, the myths of the first Norse explorers, as well as the tales of Indian shamans. Like the kame, these legends are objectively immortal, and as much a part of Olson's dogmatic condition as is his immediate breathing:

the authority of Cape Ann
the arbitrariness
of the children buried the lovekin
the source of the turning of the streets
the line of demarkation of the Abnaki
the extent
of the old Norse tales
all the way from beyond the Micmacs (from John Neptune
and other Indian shamans - that all this should have arisen
from the Earth, that Bristowe in fact was a land to be discovered
that Bridge Street on this side is exactly
where dogma does begin again (MIII, p.23)

Thus amongst the mythical sources which Olson taps in his illustration of the psychic process, are the legends compiled in the Norse Prose Edda, and certain Indian myths which he encountered in Charles Leland's collection, Algonquin Legends of New England. But probably his single most important mythic reference is Hesiod's Theogony, an initiatory epic of Western culture which gives evidence of man's proper diminished status in the context of physis. According to Olson, after 550 B.C. man was unjustifiably elevated by the Socratic school, whereas the Theogony is free of such humanist taint: "it is a total placement of man and things among all possibilities of creation, rather than that one alone... (AP, p.33). We shall see that in Jung's schema, the unconscious often takes mythic form in the primeval waters, and thus Olson readily responded to Hesiod's Okeanos as the most fitting image for the archetypal stream.

While Olson's mythic syncretism binds in Hesiodic, Algonquin, Norse,

and Egyptian elements, his very definition of myth as the universe self-contained, demands the most comprehensive of syntheses. Instances of Gloucester's geological history mesh with the circumstances of the psychic dramas enacted in Maximus IV, V, VI, as does historical incident proper. In fact, the volume parallels earth's geological development and the process of human individuation, each a variant manifestation of physis. Even the physical migrations of man across the Western world are brought into this weave of process, so that the picture on Dogtown Common is all-inclusive. With Jung's schema of individuation most definitely the substructure of the second volume, Olson exploits the source of archetypal imagery collated by the psychologist in various of his works. But these ancient images of the collective unconscious are themselves interwoven with personal anecdote and incident from Olson's own life; Maximus IV, V, VI being pre-eminently the exploration of an individual psychic process.

The psychic description which Olson appears to follow most closely, is that of Erich Neumann. Phrases in "Dogtown - I" are appropriated directly from Neumann's Great Mother, and the debt owed to his Origins and History of Consciousness is also substantial. Olson interprets the principles set down, by way of his dogmatic conditions and his own specificity in the proprioceptive act. Indeed, there are stages of Neumann's schema which ^{he} qualifies so that they will accord both with his personality and his particular reading of physis as process. Briefly stated, Neumann sees man's initial stage as a contented oblivion; he is totally unconscious, sustained by a watery womb. The next step is the emergence of consciousness which amounts, in essence, to a struggle between male and female principles, consciousness being identified mythologically with the male, and the unconscious with the female, regardless of the sex of the individual. The unconscious is

first recognized by the ego as the Great Mother who comprises both the terrible and the nourishing aspects of the original uroboros; she is both womb and tomb,⁴ as Norman O. Brown phrases it. As consciousness further develops, it distinguishes her good aspects from the destructive, and while a Beneficent Mother is retained on a conscious level, the Terrible Mother is subsumed by the unconscious. Once the ego gains a definitive ascendancy, it is able to separate the chaotic contents of the unconscious into two opposites, which take the form of the World Parents, usually Sky and Earth in their distinct roles. The individual, in the form of the hero, must then war against each of his archetypal parents; the mother in the form of the maternal unconscious, is first definitively overcome so that the ego need no longer fear being usurped by her. The confrontation with the Father amounts to the hero's pitting himself against established figures of authority, the patriarchal faction which has helped initiate him into manhood. As we shall see, it is the slaying of the World Parents which Olson greatly modifies in his explication of psychic development. As a creative artist, it is hardly in his interest to overcome completely the maternal unconscious, although he does in fact struggle with the clinging embrace of his real mother throughout the whole of his poetry. The hero's battle with the father figures becomes in Olson's psycho-cosmogonic vision, an exemplification of Whiteheadian process, the existing orders being continuously qualified by ongoing activity. The final stage, which Olson wholeheartedly endorses, is the attainment of self-hood, aided by the anima or spiritually transformative principle, which is the most sublime aspect of the Great Mother.

"Maximus, From Dogtown - I" is the second poem included in Maximus IV, V, VI. The first poem, as we shall later demonstrate, is a

4. See Brown, Love's Body (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), p.42.

condensed statement of intent, a kind of prolegomena. Olson thus properly initiates the book with a dramatic rendering of the inexorable power of the unconscious. His interest in the unconscious per se was by no means generated by the writing of these particular cosmological pieces, most of which were composed from late 1959 onward. In one of his earliest poems, "The ABC's" (1953), he describes the archetypes as literally implanted in the marrow of man's bones. "ABC(2)" is the poem which contains his famous syllogism, "of rhythm is image," and part of these productive rhythms must inevitably be the swirl of myth in the body cavity. The images he presents all originate with the terrible aspect of the Great Mother, recognized by the burgeoning consciousness as threatening its extinction. They evoke our memories of child-hood phantoms, the shadowy figures lying in wait to lead us to our doom. Olson envisages himself in a fragile boat, endeavouring to steer a course through the rush of the tidal river, and so avoid the perilous dog-rocks of Gloucester's Eastern Harbour:

what we do not know of ourselves
 of who they are who lie
 coiled or unflown
 in the marrow of the bone

one sd:

of rhythm is image
 of image is knowing
 of knowing there is
 a construct

or to find in a night who it is dwells in that wood where shapes hide
 who is this woman or this man whose face we give a name to, whose
 shoulder

we bite, what landscape
 figures ride small horses over, what bloody stumps
 these dogs have, how they tear the golden cloak

And the boat,

how he swerves to avoid the yelping rocks
 where the tidal river rushes (AM, p.51)

This picture of the frail craft narrowly escaping the rocks was to enter the field of several later poems, including "The Twist," the principal dream-poem of the first Maximus volume.

It is important to stress that Jung himself believed the archetypes to be virtually "coiled or unflown/in the marrow of the bone." In The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche, he emphasizes man's endemic attraction to myth and symbol:

Psychic development cannot be accomplished by intention and will alone; it needs the attraction of the symbol, whose value quantum exceeds that of the cause... If man lived altogether instinctively and automatically, the transformation could come about in accordance with purely biological laws. We can still see something of the sort in the psychic life of primitives, which is entirely concretistic and entirely symbolical at once. In civilized man the rationalism of consciousness, otherwise so useful to him, proves to be a most formidable obstacle to the frictionless transformation of energy. 5

Thus "Maximus, From Dogtown - I" treats the unconscious as an implacable human condition. It is before all things, with the exception possibly of Chaos and the Earth herself. As Neumann makes clear: "The discoveries of depth psychology have adduced a wealth of evidence to show that the conscious system is a product of the unconscious. Indeed, the profound and far-reaching dependence of this system upon its interior, unconscious foundation is one of the crucial discoveries of modern times."⁶ Given this originative factor, Olson begins his poem with a proem, a description of the genesis of Okeanos which borrows from Hugh Evelyn-White's translation of the Theogony:

The sea was born of the earth without sweet union of love Hesiod says

But that then she lay for heaven and she bare the thing which encloses every thing, Okeanos the one which all things are and by which nothing is anything but itself, measured so

5. Jung, The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche, trans. R.F.C. Hull (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), p.25.

6. Origins of Consciousness, p.297.

screwing earth, in whom love lies which unnerves the limbs and by its heat floods the mind and all gods and men into further nature

Vast earth rejoices,

deep-swirling Okeanos steers all things through all things,
everything issues from the one, the soul is led from drunkenness
to dryness, the sleeper lights up from the dead,
the man awake lights up from the sleeping (MII, p.2)

Evelyn-White's translation reads: "The fruitless deep with his raging swell, Pontus," was born by Earth "without sweet union of love. But afterward she lay with Heaven and bare deep-swirling Oceanus..."⁷

Okeanos is thus not to be confused with the sea, as Olson makes clear in the poem's opening lines. In a footnote to his translation, Evelyn-White remarks on Hesiod's phrase, "back-flowing Ocean," conjecturing that Okeanos was regarded as "a continuous stream enclosing the earth and sea, and so flowing back upon himself" (p.135). It was this concept of the great container curving back upon itself which inspired in Olson a cosmological hieroglyph. Hesiod states that Okeanos consists of nine streams, and thus in the later "Maximus, From Dogtown - IV," Olson makes the image still more explicit:

... like Ocean
which is 9 times around
earth and sea (Heaven is 9 times
around earth and sea folding and folding
earth and sea in its backward it
wraps and wraps the consistency
of mass in... (MII, p.168)

7. Hesiod, The Homeric Hymns, trans. H.G. Evelyn-White (London: William Heinemann, 1914), p.87.

We have already noted the resemblance between Okeanos and the uroboros, the ring snake with its tail in its mouth, which symbolizes both psychic and cosmological beginnings. But, in fact, the uroboros is the primeval water, the archetype of genesis which any man might recognize as operant in his own psyche. Neumann points out that "as a ring snake the uroboros is also the ocean - is the source not only of creation but of wisdom too."⁸ And Jung posits that "the maternal significance of water is one of the clearest interpretations of symbol in the whole field of mythology... even the ancient Greeks could say that 'the sea is the symbol of generation.'"⁹ Drawing on purely classical sources in his first published book, Call Me Ishmael, Olson had incorporated Homer's reference to "the god of genesis [as] 'River Ocean'" (p.106), as well as including the single highly suggestive statement: "Porphyry wrote that the generation of images in the mind is from water" (p.110). Thus the Okeanos of the "Dogtown" poems binds in the archetype of the infinitely fertile unconscious, Olson's acknowledgement of Hesiod's physis, and the dogmatic conditions of Gloucester; as will become apparent, the fact that the city is surrounded by water, becomes an essential part of Olson's mythic vision. Okeanos "encloses/ everything" in the very act of wrapping round the consistency of earth and seas, and as image of the unconscious, Okeanos is likewise all-comprehensive. The mental images and dream-portraits of all men are contained in the Great Round. Olson is careful to note that in Hesiod's cosmology, the progenitors of Okeanos are Earth and Heaven, the ultimate female and male principles. And it is these two opposites into which the emergent ego will split the uroboros, thereby separating the World

8. Origins of Consciousness, p.23.

9. Jung, Symbols of Transformation, trans. R.F.C. Hull (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956), p.218.

Parents and establishing the realms of Earth and Sky. But in its primal state the uroboros does hold within itself all the various poles of existence, male and female, merciless and bountiful, destructive and spiritual. The phrase, "everything issues from the one," may owe something to Neumann, who designates the first psychic stage as an all-comprehensive nondifferentiation:

The phase in which the ego germ is contained in the unconscious, like the embryo in the womb, when the ego has not yet appeared as a conscious complex and there is no tension between the ego system and the unconscious, is the phase we have designated as uroboric and pleromatic. Uroboric, because it is dominated by the symbol of the circular snake, standing for total nondifferentiation, everything issuing from everything, and again entering into everything, depending on everything and connecting with everything; pleromatic, because the ego germ still dwells in the pleroma, in the "fulness" of the unformed God, and as consciousness unborn, slumbers in the primordial egg, in the bliss of paradise *[italics mine]*. 10

Once the ego ceases its unknowing slumber, and achieves consciousness of both self and world, the positively informing potential of the unconscious begins to impress itself, the agency of spiritual transformation implicit in the uroboros. Neumann sees the highest manifestation of this transformative principle in the alchemical persona of Sophia, whose name Olson invokes in the later poems of the second volume (See p.138). It is therefore by means of Okeanos that the soul can be led from an indiscriminating "drunkenness" to a spiritually aware "dryness;" and that the conscious man may awake enlightened from the archetypal content of dream.

The actual drama of "Dogtown - I" is introduced by the phrase, "watered rock," printed in bold capitals. Again Olson is drawing on images from his earlier work. In "Other Than" (1951), a poem integral to the series which urged contemporary poets to break with restrictive

conventions, he questions whether the origin of poetic image be water or rock:

the season
 is forever
 cold,
 and the reason the rock
 (if you can call the mind
 Or is it from water
 that images
 come? (AM, p.57).

The solution, at which the dramas of all the "Dogtown" poems aim, is their origination in a fusion of both the fecund unconscious and the adamantine conscious mind. It is a fusion which "Dogtown - I's" protagonist, Merry, is tragically slow to realize. This poem's drama does not follow the conventional progressions, and we are initially confronted with the dénouement, the shattering of Merry's body on "Dogtown meadow rocks:"

WATERED ROCK

of pasture meadow orchard road where Merry
 died in pieces tossed by the bull he raised himself to fight
 in front of people, to show off his
 Handsome Sailor ism-

died as torso head & limbs
 in a Saturday night's darkness
 drunk trying
 to get the young bull down
 to see if Sunday morning again he might
 before the people show off
 once more
 his prowess - braggart man to die
 among Dogtown meadow rocks (MII, p.2)

What emerges, therefore, is that Merry is an inebriated sailor who foolishly attempts to demonstrate his masculine prowess by taking on a baby bull. The results are predictable. Olson moves next directly

into the cosmic setting of the event. Neumann depicts the ego as initially an embryo within the womb of the uroboros, and against the unhurried orders of physis, Olson portrays Merry's bold action as likewise insignificant. The primeval water is not only above, but "under" Dogtown; the generative waters seep upwards through meadow and rocks producing the fertile muck which is a manifestation of the Great Mother. But as Okeanos props up Dogtown in the celestial vault, so in the form of ice, the waters hold the landscape down. The very structure of the earth is dependent on this circle of waters, and it is this power which Merry vainly tries to challenge when he grapples with one of the most potent representatives of physis:

"under" the dish
 of the earth
 Okeanos under
 Dogtown
 through which (inside of which)
 the sun passes at night -
 she passes the sun back to
 the east through her body
 the Geb (of heaven) at night

Nut is water
 above & below, vault
 above and below
 watered rock on which
 by which Merry
 was so many pieces
 Sunday morning

subterranean and celestial
 primordial water holds
 Dogtown high

And down
 the ice holds
 Dogtown, scattered
 boulders little bull
 who killed
 Merry
 who sought to manifest
 his soul, the stars
 manifest their souls

The Egyptian sky goddess, whose reinstatement Olson had desired in "In Cold Hell, in Thicket," also participates in Merry's fatal instruction. The interpretation of Nut as sustaining circle of waters Olson owes to Neumann, who includes her in his instances of the Great Round, the stage at which the uroboros is recognized as such by the ego:

... for Nut is not only the daytime sky but also the western devourer of the sun that passes back to the east through her body, which is the upper night sky.

Thus Nut is water above and below, vault above and below, life and death, east and west, generating and killing, in one. For she is not only the lady with the thousand souls, who causes the stars to manifest their souls, but also the sow who devours her own children, sun, moon, and stars in the west (Great Mother, p.222).

Thus in attempting to "manifest his soul" without taking account of the all-nourishing maternal unconscious, Merry vainly tries to collapse the inexorable sequence of the individuation process. Olson also plays upon the image of Nut as devouring sow. He invokes "my soft sow," the body of Dogtown made yielding and plastic by the waters of his own unconscious. Nut is both transformer and destroyer: Merry is not as yet cognizant of her power, but Olson is, and consequently begins to school his own son in a proper appreciation of the transformative character of water, as agent both in physiography and psyche:

my soft sow the roads
of Dogtown trickling like from underground rock
springs under an early cold March moon

or hot summer and my son
we come around a corner
where a rill
makes Gee Avenue in a thin
ford

after we see a black duck
walking across a populated
corner

life spills out (MII, p.3)

Olson opposes himself to Merry in the poem, since a fitting respect for the maternal unconscious is a stage he has necessarily mastered already. The "black duck" has an echo in yet another early biographical poem, "An Ode on Nativity," in which Olson records the first poetic image he made as a child. In that poem he propagandizes his favourite theme of instantaneous perception, the sole source of image. By such immediate transformations of content, he insists, man creates the most basic of world pictures, "a surface" which the ducks can walk on. The occasion inspiring "An Ode on Nativity" was the conflagration of the Sawyer lumber yard in Worcester, Massachusetts. Olson went with his father at midnight to watch the spectacle, and with a child's receptiveness, noted that on the iced pond "the ducks/are the only skaters." In structuring a world through image, it is thus the memory of his seventh year which he applied to test the solidity of its base:

Any season, in this fresh time
is off & on to that degree that any of us miss
the vision, lose the instant and decision, the close
which can be nothing more and no thing else
than that which unborn form you are the content of, which you
alone can make to shine, throw that like light
even where the mud was and now there is a surface
ducks, at least, can walk on. And I
have company
in the night (AM, p.83)

As Olson's father led him unfailingly to the scene which inspired his first imagistic rendering of nature, so Olson takes his own son to the pliable landscape of Dogtown, and particularly to the point "where a rill/makes Gee Avenue in a thin/ford." And the point is that the rill does, in fact, make Gee Avenue, as Olson maintains each of us makes our own world structure. The rill might well be a tiny stream originating from the Okeanos of the unconscious. But the "rill" signifies as well, the valleys on the moon's surface, and the moon, as Neumann points out, is inextricable from the female mantic principle. Indeed, Dogtown

could hardly escape, in general terms, having a female significance for Olson, and this is perhaps another reason that he chose her land mass as the background for his demonstrations of psychic process. In the first volume of Maximus, he records that in the seventeenth century, Dogtown became a repository for Gloucester's womanhood, where they might "be safe from the French,/and piracy..." (MI, p.30). And in his "Annotated Guide to the Maximus Poems," George Butterick explains the origination of the name "from the dogs kept for protection by widows and elderly women who lived there during the latter part of the eighteenth century" (p.18). A community of elderly women cannot help but call to mind the witch-like manifestations of the Terrible Mother. Dogtown is thus justifiably depicted as a landscape permeated by the waters of the female unconscious.

Olson draws very definite parallels between the evolving geography of the physical world, and man's mythic shaping of his perceived world. One of the earliest poems included in the third volume maps out this correspondence clearly. As water from glacial run-off carries the silt which forms major land accretions, so the rills originating from man's unconscious sea determine unique physiographies. Dogtown is "soft" as a result of both processes, and Olson sits by the mounds of deposited sediment, speculating on the spiritual potential latent in his dogmatic conditions, a malleable landscape, a receptive eye, and the alembic of the unconscious waters:

... Finding out
there is no doorstep
equal to the heart
of God sitting by
the cellar
of Widow Day's
kame These high-lying benches
of drift material
where subglacial streams emerged
lay down there fields when Dogtown lay
below the level of the sea, Fled

the softness
for the west

or the top of the hill, fled
the deserted streets a December
 stayed at home

until human beings come back
until human beings

were the streets of the soul
love was in their wrinkles

they filled the earth, the positiveness
was in their being, they listened

to the sententious,
with ears of the coil of the sea

they were the paths of water green and rich
under the ice, carrying the stratified drift kame

dropping their self-hooded anger
into the dialogue of their beloveds
taking their own way to the throne of creation (MIII,
p.16-17)

The poem marks a moment of despondency successfully overcome by the renewing power of Olson's imago mundi. He flees the streets of Gloucester to ruminate on the kame which distinguishes the lot of Widow Day. From this certain shaping of physis by way of water, he is able to affirm man's capability of working an identical process. He lets the vision lighten his own soul until human beings "come back," love in the wrinkles of their bodies, as water seeps into the interstices of the earth. He is ecstatic picturing man listening "to the coils of the sea," able once again to achieve a heaven on earth.

The very separation of the continents as we now know them, Olson similarly gives a personally mythic origination. The goal of his mind's own alchemy is to create an image of the world in its entirety, and thus the cover of Maximus IV, V, VI, as well as the book's initial poem, display the earth in one of her primal configurations, when Africa and

Eurasia were still united in the continent Gondwana. It is Olson's objective to follow through the separation of the continents, and the accretion and erosion of land masses, with an exact mythic correspondence. In the poem "Astride/the Cabot/fault," which itself moves westward across the page in duplication of the land mass of America across the earth, he is a Colossus, spanning continent and Atlantic Ocean. And so the proprioceptive act spans rock and water, the conscious receptiveness of mind and the fluidity of innate unconscious. Out of his body, he reconstructs the earth in all her geographical peculiarity:

Astride
the Cabot
fault,

one leg upon the Ocean one leg
upon the Westward drifting continent,

to build out of sound the wall
of a city,

the earth
rushing westward 2'
each 100
years, 300 years past
500 years
since Cabot, stretching
the Ocean, the earth

going NNW, course due
W from north of the
Azores, St Martin's
Land,

the division
increasing yet the waters
of the Atlantic
lap the shore ... (MIII, p.37)

The modifications of earth's face continue, the continents drifting farther and farther west, for as long as the Atlantic persists in lapping at the shore; Olson is committed to keeping psychically astride all these modulations.

The original union of all the continents remains a source of

fascination, and in "MAREOCEANUM," one of the later poems of the third volume, he marvels how Gloucester was once directly adjacent to the Canary Islands, and the North Atlantic but "a pond" (p.162). Thus in "Letter # 41," the prolegomena to volume II, he elucidates his own task as cosmic creator. He must take upon himself the reconstruction of the world from its very originations in the nondifferentiated primal waters; he must sunder Gondwana so as to endow Africa and Eurasia with their contemporary coastlines. Revealingly, it is the moon's reflected face which mocks his efforts to draw the material of the universe into its radiant shapes; the moon as Great Mother was once capable of thwarting Olson's labours, but secured "under" his consciousness, she becomes an essential agency in mythic creation:

I count such shapes this evening in the universe
 I run back home out of the new moon
 makes fun of me in each puddle on the road.
 The war of Africa against Eurasia
 has just begun again. Gondwana (III, p.1)

The poem is the ideal initiatory piece in that it incorporates the occasion inspiring Olson's very first poem, the St. Valentine Day's storm of 1940. According to Butterick's "Annotated Guide," Olson left his mother's house where he was living at the time, "to wander down to the bay, bombarded by sheets of ice blown in from the sea" (p.82). The storm was a particularly severe one and became legendary in Gloucester history, as indeed it becomes a focal image in Olson's poetry. The landmarks of the city were apparently indistinguishable beneath the swirl of white, and in the earlier poem, "The Twist," he describes the obliterated landscape as a tossing mass of precipitation:

the night of the St Valentine
 storm: the air
 sea ground the same, tossed
 ice wind snow (Pytheus) one
 cakes falling

as quiet as I was
 out of the sky as quiet
 as the blizzard was (MI, p.84)

Like the embryonic ego, Olson can barely discriminate himself from the silent falling snow. He knits in an exploration motif with his reference to Pytheus, according to the historian Strabo, the first Greek to visit the Atlantic coast of Europe, where he reported sighting to the north of the British Isles a most mysterious island which he called Ultima Thule. Strabo renders Pytheus' description imagistically in his Geography:

There is no longer either land properly so-called, or sea, or air, but a kind of substance concreated from all the elements... a thing in which, he says, the earth, the sea, and all the elements are held in suspension; and this is a sort of bond to hold all together, which you can neither walk nor sail upon. 11

Both the miasma of the storm and Pytheus' vaporous island are readily recognized as images of the all-generative uroboros. Olson's very first poem was therefore the perfect embarkation point for a career devoted to mytho-psychic exploration. His mother's presence on this formulative occasion is equally important, and in "Letter # 41," he describes himself actually leaping from the maternal confines; the break of the male consciousness with the original female smother of the uroboros, must be that forcible. He suggests, in fact, that the sundering is so incisive, his mother sees him as an entity unto himself for the first time in nineteen years:

With a leap (she said it was an arabesque
 I made, off the porch, the night of the
 St Valentine Day's storm, into the snow.
 Nor did she fail of course to make the point
 what a sight I was the size I am all over the storm
 trying to be graceful Or was it? She hadn't seen me
 in 19 years (MII, p.1)

11. Strabo, The Geography, trans. H.L. Jones (London: William Heinemann, 1917), I, p.399.

Olson places this poem immediately previous to Merry's tribulations, since it is indicative of his own emergence from the womb of the unconscious, and yet implies his deep respect for the fertilizing waters which facilitate the mythic structuring of Gloucester.

But in order that the psychic process of the second volume be complete, he must draw Merry through all the incipient phases of the ego's struggle with unconscious powers. The bullfight itself is representative of a certain tentative advance toward total self-consciousness. We have already noted that as the ego gradually develops, it divides the dualistic Great Mother into two halves, the Good Mother who serves as beneficent protector and the Terrible Mother, whose attributes are relegated to the unconscious. Neumann sees the unconscious residue taking shape in a hostile animal, against which the fledgling ego must do battle. At this early stage, however, the ego must inevitably fail, since the animal is a tool of the Great Mother and she is still wholly omnipotent:

The growth of self-consciousness and the strengthening of masculinity thrust the image of the Great Mother into the background; the patriarchal society splits it up, and while only the picture of the good Mother is retained in consciousness, her terrible aspect is relegated to the unconscious.

The result of this fragmentation is that it is no longer the Great Mother who is the killer, but a hostile animal, for instance, a boar or bear... (Origins, p.94)

The emergence of the male killer in the cycle of the Great Mother myths is an evolutionary advance, for it means that the son has regained a greater measure of independence. To begin with the boar is part of the uroboros, but in the end he becomes part of the son himself. The boar is then the equivalent of the self-destruction which the myth represents as self-castration. The male killer is merely a symbol of the destructive tendency which turns against itself in the act of self-sacrifice (Origins, p.95).

The youths who die by their own hands in puberty represent all those who succumb to the dangers of this fight, who cannot make the grade and perish in the trials

of initiation, which still take place today as always, but in the unconscious. Their self-destruction and tragic self-division are nevertheless heroic. The strugglers might be described as negative, doomed heroes. The male killer at work behind the destructive tendency is still, although the ego does not know it, the instrument of the Great Mother... but, for all that, an ego that kills itself is more active, more independent and individual, than the sad resignation of the languishing lover (Origins, p.97).

The stage of the "languishing lover" to which Neumann refers, is the ego's fatalistic manipulation by the uroboros. The ego is here totally passive, succumbing to the least twist in the coil. Neumann's revelation that the hostile animal is in actuality a projection of the male killer himself, Olson incorporates into the substance of Merry's drama, specifying that Merry has raised the animal himself for the express purpose of grappling with it. The sailor must drink himself into a stupor before he can carry out his plan, little realizing that drunkenness is itself a ploy of the Great Mother to keep him in thrall. But consistent with her dualistic nature, intoxicants, narcotics, and orgiastic stupors are also productive of spiritual ecstasy, and thus Merry treads a fine wire in his inebriation. But because of his nascent development, he is prey rather to the lethal inducements of the goddess. Olson invokes the Mexican goddess Mayauel in illustrating the extent of Merry's powerlessness, again drawing on Neumann's collocation of Great Mother images:

Mayauel goddess of the intoxicant made from the maguey, possessed the secret of the plant that made the juice ferment and possessed also the "wort, or 'medecine' which gave a narcotic quality to the octli drink and which was thought of as 'strangling' or choking the drunkard. The plant in question has the appearance of a rope..." She is the Strangling One, and all males have succumbed to the pleasure, magic, and intoxication that she communicates; but she is also the Healing One, and her husband is "he from the land of medecine."... Mayauel... is a bringer both of intoxication and death.

Here again the goddess of intoxicating liquor is the Great Goddess, the Mother, goddess of the earth and the

night. It is therefore no accident that Mayauel is the earth monster, the goddess of the earth and the corn, and the night sky. As the goddess with the "four hundred" - i.e., innumerable - breasts, she is the heavenly mother nourishing the stars who are the fish swimming in the heavenly ocean, and with whom the four hundred gods of the octli or pulque, her sons, are identical (Great Mother, pp.300-301).

So Olson's Merry has drunk both octli and pulque, and he dies in as many pieces as Mayauel has sons. He tragically takes on the eternally invincible, the primal mother of all things:

She is the heavenly mother
the stars are the fish swimming
in the heavenly ocean she has
four hundred breasts

Merry could have used
as many could have drunk
the strength he claimed
he had, the bravo

Pulque in Spain
where he saw the fight
octli in Mexico
where he wanted to
show off
dead in Gloucester
where he did

The four hundred gods
of drink alone
sat with him
as he died
in pieces

In 400 pieces
his brain shot
the last time the bull
hit him pegged him
to the rock

before he tore him
to pieces

the night sky
looked down (MII, pp.4-5)

Like the electron radiating energy through the field, the activity of the Great Mother is inexorable.

Immediately following this second descriptive death-scene, Olson returns to his personal affirmation of physis, both nature in its raw extent, and the unconscious powers resident in his own living tissue. He celebrates the water which permeates the earth and the water that holds down the land. By virtue of this very pliability, the bios or quick-silver "life" implicit in physis, he is able to construct a firmament on which is played out the "eternal events" which are Whitehead's forms:

Dogtown is soft
in every season
high up on her granite
horst, light growth
of all trees and bushes
strong like a puddle's ice
the bios
of nature in this
park of eternal
events is a sidewalk
to slide on... (MII, p.5)

"We drink/or break open/our veins solely/to know....," Olson declares, and while both intoxication and the ego's battle may result initially in "death," they are rigours which the neophyte must undergo if he is ultimately to draw on the maternal source of physical and spiritual life. Merry, in all his immaturity, approached the problem wrongly, denying the many manifestations of the Great Mother: "the plants of heaven/the animals of the soul." And as a final demonstration of her potency, the fertile vessel of earth takes him back into herself. Neumann points out that "in the Rig-Veda the earth is invoked as the coverer who takes the dead man to herself: 'As a mother covers her son with the hem of her cloak, so cover him thou, O earth'" (Great Mother, p.223). This image is sustained in Olson's sealing of Merry's fate:

Only the sun
in the morning
covered him
with flies

Then only
 after the grubs
 had done him
 did the earth
 let her robe
 uncover and her part
 take him in (MII, p.6)

But fortunately for Merry the return to the earthly womb can signify regeneration, just as many dismembered heroes have been made whole again in the magic cauldron. Olson leaves his protagonist's possible resurrection a mystery, however. Merry's role was to demonstrate on the stage of Dogtown the omnipotence of the earth mother, and the corresponding powers of the unconscious in the initial phases of psychic growth. Olson profits by Merry's suffering, for this smooth flowing poetic demonstration allows him to affirm repeatedly throughout volumes II and III of Maximus, the necessary participation of the unconscious coils in the creation of an imago mundi. He puts it dogmatically in volume III:

... the earth
 is only round when water
 fills up ocean to the
 top (p.88)

A recurring image in both volumes, making clear the involvement of the unconscious, is that of leftward movement. Jung explains in his Psychology and Alchemy that "circulation going to the left" signifies that "consciousness is moving toward the unconscious" (p.184). And by such leftward progressions, Olson comes himself to the fluidity of mythic content. In volume III he delineates simply the integral vision of Okeanos, wobbling in its protean comprehensiveness:

I looked up
 and saw
 I was faced
 to the left

 Okeanos,
 the wobbling
 ring (p.19)

In the poem beginning with the Greek noun peloria, Olson ties the leftward movement toward the unconscious, with the leftward or westward migrations of mankind, which he sees as culminating ultimately at Gloucester, the last shore. "I am making a mappemunde," he explains in the poem, and his instinctual progression toward the wobbling Okeanos is as much a part of his mapping of the world, as are the moving populations of history. Indeed, as the rills of the unconscious mirror the geological structuring of the world, so the psyche's leftward tendency duplicates the drifting migrations of humanity. Peloria as Jane Harrison points out in Themis (p.458), is a noun combining "monster" and "portent." This dualism naturally calls to mind the antipodal character of the Great Mother, and, in fact, the dog of the poem whom Olson observes, is a whelping bitch with curling fangs. He takes the image from a plate included in Neumann's Great Mother.¹² It is a photograph of an archaic Greek scaraboid seal, representing with anatomical exactitude the underside of a bitch. The genital area is exposed and the size of the teats is exaggerated so as to emphasize the notion of the nourishing mother. Neumann sees the seal as symbolizing the most positive aspects of the Great Mother as giver of life. But for Olson the engraving is more properly described by peloria, binding in both the repugnant and the beneficent characteristics of the uroboros. The dog's gums are a "sick brown colour" and she has a long, shark-like jaw. When drawing on the unconscious, all its contents are of moment, and as Olson must include the stench of harbour waters in the Flower of Gloucester, so he must take into account all the images which leftward progression inspires. These are the materials of the creativity of Maximus:

12. See Plate LI.

Peloria the dog's upper lip kept curling
 in his sleep as I was drawn to the leftward to
 watch his long shark jaw and sick brown color
 gums the teeth flashing even as he dreamed
 Maximus is a whelping mother, giving birth
 with the crunch of his own pelvis.
 He sent flowers on the waves from the mole
 of Tyre. He went to Malta. From Malta
 to Marseilles. From Marseilles to Iceland.
 From Iceland to Promontorium Vinlandiae.
 Flowers go out on the sea. On the left
 of the Promontorium. On the left of the
 Promontorium, Settlement Cove

I am making a mappemunde. It is to include my being.
 It is called here, at this point and point of time
 Peloria (MII, p.87).

Another hieroglyph which Jung sees as exemplifying unconscious
 process is that of the spiral:

We can hardly help feeling that the unconscious process is that of
 the spiral: gradually getting closer, while the characteristics of
 the centre grow more and more distinct. Or perhaps we could
 put it another way and say that the centre - itself virtually unknow-
 able - acts like a magnet on the disparate materials and processes
 of the unconscious and gradually captures them in a crystal lattice.¹³

Olson had early seized on this image, as is evidenced by his titling one
 of the major dream-poems of the first Maximus, "The Twist." In "Stage
Fort Park," a later poem of the second volume, he combines the spiral and
 the leftward movement, again paralleling his mythic productions to the
 glacial transformations of Gloucester's physiography:

... I now have windings of as steep and left-ward twisting
 as those ice-rock grindings were
 the giant ran over and caught
 where ground itself is a fucking hole (MII, p.151)

13. Psychology and Alchemy, p.207.

Leftward spirals are actually placed as glyphs in the poem beginning, "Physically I am home" included in volume III (p.84). And in a still later poem, the spiral becomes the tightening petals of Dante's cosmic rose, Olson willing its twisting to the west:

if I twist West I curl into the tightest Rose, if right
into the Color of the East, and North and South are
then the Sun's half-handling of the Earth. These aspects,
annular-Eternal - the tightest Rose is the World, the Vision
is the Face of God... (MIII, p.106)

And weaving through volumes II and III is the ring snake itself. Again accentuating the correspondences between Gloucester history and the psychic process, Olson describes the recorded sighting of a monstrous snake swimming around Ten Pound Island:

He was here, 1817 August 23rd
and seen by all involved including
scientists from the Linnaean Society,
Cambridge

- drawings exist
of his appearance August 14th
as well (by Captain John Beach

a dark brown snake
sailing around Ten Pound Island
not like a common snake
but a caterpillar (MIII, p.59)

In a poem from volume II entitled "Hepit.Naga.Atosis," an Algonquin phrase meaning "the woman and the serpent," he constructs a kind of

parable based on historical incident. A coiled serpent was apparently spotted in Gloucester Harbour by some seventeenth-century English settlers, and their Indian guides. The Indians, with their greater affinity for the workings of physis, dissuade the English from killing the snake, for if it were killed "outright," they insist, they would all risk death. Thus the anecdote encompasses the indirection of the individuation process. The unconscious is but figuratively slain in the person of the archetypal mother, so that the ego may emerge to perform its function. But to slay her outright would be to enter on the most desiccating rationalism, tantamount to psychic death:

entwined
throughout
the system,

they saw a Serpent that lay quoiled like a cable
and a boat passing with English aboard, and two Indians
they would have shot the Serpent but the Indians

dissuaded them, saying

that if He was killed outright they would all be in danger
of their lives (upon a rock at Cape Ann, Josselyn, Rarities
Discovered in Birds, Fishes, Serpents and Plants, London(MII,p.121)

Neumann is careful to point out with regard to the uroboros, that it is not only the symbol of all origination, psychic and cosmological, but reappears in addition, as the culminating image of self-hood:

The same uroboric symbolism that stands at the beginning, before ego development starts, reappears at the end when ego development is replaced by the development of self, or individuation. When the universal principle of opposites no longer predominates, and devouring or being devoured by the world has ceased to be of prime importance, the uroboros symbol will reappear as the mandala in the psychology of the adult (Origins, p.36).

Thus Olson's historical, and personally mythic serpent becomes transfigured in volume III as pervasive spiritual king. It is a single glyph affirming self-hood and the unity of physis:

Coiled,

throughout the system

the jewel

in his eye (MIII, p.61)

But the break with the smothering embrace of the unconscious is a task which must be accomplished if the individual is eventually to attain self-hood, and behold the diamond-eyed serpent. This struggle, as we noted previously, is symbolized by the polarity of male and female:

... it is consistent with the conscious-unconscious structure of the opposites that the unconscious should be regarded as predominantly feminine, and consciousness as predominantly masculine. The correlation is self-evident, because the unconscious, alike in its capacity to bring to birth and to destroy through absorption, has feminine affinities. The feminine is conceived mythologically under the aspect of this archetype; uroboros and Great Mother are both feminine dominants, and all the psychic constellations over which they rule are under the dominance of the unconscious. Conversely, its opposite, the system of ego consciousness, is masculine. With it are associated the qualities of volition, decision, and activity as contrasted with the determinism and blind "drives" of the preconscious, egoless state (Origins, p.125).

Many poems in volume II delineate the crucial mastery of the female principle by the resolute ego. Very early in the progression of his schema, Olson includes the substance of an Algonquin legend which relates how a very beautiful woman kills five of her husbands by transferring to them the venom of her snake-lover. The sixth, "such a silent man he passed/for a fool..." (p.21) discovers her in the act of copulation with the serpent, and thus wisely refuses her embrace. Unable to pass on the poison, the woman dies. Olson's source for the tale is Charles Leland's Algonquin Legends of New England, and he incorporates it into Maximus IV, V, VI almost verbatim, the major change being the breaking of the prose sentences into shortened breath-lines.

No doubt Olson was delighted by the fact that he had found in Algonquin myth, a substantiation of Jung's theory of the collective unconscious. The tale perfectly exemplifies the triumph of conscious attributes over the embroilments of the uroboros. According to Neumann, "the terrible aspect of the Feminine always includes the uroboric snake woman, the woman with the phallus, the unity of child-bearing and begetting, of life and death..." (Great Mother, p.170); as the Indian legend itself makes clear, the key to survival is an assiduous watchfulness "day and night." The eye and the head are revelatory images of the male consciousness and it is by perception and lucidity that the sixth husband escapes insensate oblivion.

One of the earlier poems in volume III plays on a similar theme, when Olson takes upon himself the instruction of woman-kind in the requisite arts of direct attention and indeed, mythological process. As consistently blind and unaware, the female principle must necessarily be ignorant of the creative powers of the unconscious which she predominates. Olson is most patient in his tutelage, and once again relies on Dogtown's dogmatic conditions to provide the exemplary demonstration:

I told the woman
about the spring
on the other side of Freshwater
Cove which lies
right on the edge of the
marsh and is flooded
each high tide by
the Ocean which it then
expells it runs so fast itself
from the sources and to drink it
the moment the tide has pulled off even one little bit
is a water untasteable elsewhere (MIII, p.14).

Olson's own mastery of the primal uroboric state is affirmed throughout the second volume. For the creative artist, the balance of

consciousness and unconscious must at times be extremely precarious, and the maintenance of a conscious ascendancy is thus no single act, but a frequently recurring contest. Even his historical investigations bring to light an instructive image which is included in the Maximus as self-reminder. This fragment is presumably from the preliminary report of a nineteenth-century engineer employed by the city of Gloucester:

that the sea
may not rush in an abatis

to be put around the work a palisading
be carried across the gorge (MII, p.189)

Indeed, Olson's relation to his own mother involved the creation of such barriers, and in the sporadic references to his parents, we see evidence of the classical archetypes which Neumann describes as operant in the methodology of the psyche. In an early autobiographical statement, "The Present is Prologue" (1955), Olson appears actually to compound the two, the archetypal mingling with the genetic:

I am still, at 40, hugely engaged with my parents, in fact more engaged with them now than with that I spent so much time on in my 20s and 30s: society and other persons... So, first, I tell you their names and places, to indicate how I am of the heterogeneous present and not of the old homogeneity of the Founders, and the West.

My father was born Karl Joseph Olsen, in Sweden, and his name probably reflects... that they were Hungarians on my grandmother's side. He was carried to the States at five months.

My mother was Mary Hines, and Yeats told me... that my mother's aunt must have been his 'Mary Hines,' the beloved of the blind poet Raftery and 'the most beautiful woman in all Western Ireland.' It was rough on my mother when I found this out at 18 - my father and I never let her forget the fall from grace, that she was only the most beautiful woman in South Worcester, Mass.

But what strikes me (and I now suspect has much more governed the nature of my seven years of writing than I knew) is the depth to which the parents who live in us (they are not the same) are our definers (AP, p.39).

Despite his protest that the archetypal and the genetic are "not the same," the entry of his real parents repeatedly in the mythological poems, suggests that in many ways they are identical. We have seen the regret he expresses in "As the Dead Prey Upon Us" (1956), at never having established a communicative proximity with his mother. In "Moonset, Gloucester, December 1, 1957, 1:58 AM," he envisions in the setting of the moon, his final liberation from the maternal thralls. The poem is a tortured lament; agonized in his efforts to be free of his mother's guise of martyrdom, he is nevertheless soldered to her through her suffering, and the relief at the severing is mixed with loss:

After 47 years this month
a Monday at 9 AM
you set I rise I hope
a free thing as probably
what you more were Not
the suffering one you sold
sowed me on Rise
Mother from off me
God damn you God damn me my
misunderstanding of you

I can die now I just begun to live (AM, p.173)

In his "O'Ryan" series, he affirms that only through some sort of emotional damnation, can the ego wrest itself from the clutch of the personal mother. "What a man has to do, he has to/meet his mother in hell," he instructs ominously (AM, p.156); both the genetic and archetypal mothers must be confronted in the darkness of one's own psychic creation, and there overcome. This theme of struggle enters early in Maximus IV, V, VI, in the form of an anecdote which might easily be glossed over, were it not for its larger significance:

... Edward Dahlberg
on my own field, assaulting my mother
because she gave me the pork chops - Edward
glaring out of his one good eye to register
his notice of the preference) "spoiling"
me - la! The which I do here record
for eternity no less, lest it be lost, that
a mother is a hard thing to get away from(MII, p.37)

Olson's descriptions of his father likewise approximate the archetypal male consciousness as described by Neumann. Volition, decision, and activity are the qualities cited as distinguishing the male from the female principle, and throughout the three volumes of Maximus, Olson's father is never portrayed in any other way. In fact, Karl Olson was to stand so resolutely by his decisions, that as his son points out, "it was my father's stubbornness that killed him in the end."¹⁴ In the first volume of Maximus, Olson depicts his father as both physically strong, and purposeful. They are drawings taken from a child's diminished perspective, but importantly these are the images which Olson retains through man-hood and self-hood:

There is this rock breaches
the earth: the Whale's Jaw
my father stood inside of

I have a photograph, him
a smiling Jonah forcing back those teeth
Or more Jehovah, he looks that strong
he could have split the rock
as it is split... (MI, p.32)

I am small, people go off
what strikes me as questionable
directions. They are large,
going away from my father and me,
as cows on that landscape

he and I seeming
the only ones who know
what we are doing, where
we are going (MI, p.83)

One of the enlightenments of Olson's story, "The Post Office" is that it was his father who fostered his avid interest in Gloucester history, and particularly the fishing industry (See PO, p.28). Such responsiveness evidences the conscious rule of hand and eye, and as an immigrant, Olson points out, his father perceived America more reverentially than did the native - born. Olson's father died of a

14. Olson, The Post Office (Bolinas: Grey Fox Press, 1975), p.23.

stroke at the age of 52, hastened to his death, his son maintained, by the unjust treatment of his employers. Although strikes were illegal for American postal employees, Karl Olson was secretary for an organization devoted to improving the working conditions of mail carriers. His employers sought their vengeance by cancelling without notice, a week's holiday on which he had planned to take his son Charles to the Tercentenary Celebration of the Pilgrims' landing at Plymouth. He simply balked at the notification, carrying through his plans for the vacation, and was thereafter charged with insubordination and profanity. He was then removed from the route he had serviced for many years, and it is an index of his humanity and reliability, that the residents organized themselves to protest his demotion. In his short story Olson enumerates the many extra courtesies which his father extended to the people on his route, forwarding their mail to them while they were on holiday, bringing them stamps, and stopping to chat to the inmates of a local mental institution. These are all marks of the human universe which Olson was to celebrate in prose in 1950, and indeed, he describes his father's activities as both humane and spiritualized:

That route was my father's parish, village to which he was crier and walking mayor. He was more intimate to the community, and the lives of all the people, than anyone else could be. The people showed it, the way they fought for him, when the crisis came (PO, p.36).

Olson's father was eventually restored to his old route, but in the fourteen years separating the initial incident and his death, he was subjected to various humiliations, the three stars on his sleeve signifying fifteen years' service being removed, for example. Karl Olson handled these attempts at psychic attrition by persisting in a virtually archetypal stance, the pitting of the ego against the figures of authority. Ironically, this necessitated his approaching even higher

figures of authority in a search for justice, his senator and his congressman. But as Olson marvels in his story, "it didn't ... break his will. He didn't give in. He only died" (PO, p.51). By such inflexibility his father becomes a crystallization of one of the primary characteristics of male consciousness. His struggle had an impact on Olson so incisive that he describes it as curtailing abruptly his own child-like sleep in the uroboric womb:

It is also my thought that, because it was my father who was struck, intensified the role he played for me before and after. He had added dimension because he was the single image of life, I had lived so long in the sleep of the mother (PO, p.36).

His father was also to become synonymous with the demonic principle, in his classical struggle with "the bosses." We will see evidence of this in the following chapter, with the examination of Olson's treatment of the Hesiodic monster, Typhon. Even Olson, however, admits that his father was stubborn to a fault: his life was never lightened by the grace of the transformative principle which the son so painstakingly sought. Nevertheless, in his imagistic embodiment of male consciousness, Karl Olson was to stimulate his son's awareness of the process of self-hood. Neumann sees the separation of the World Parents as attendant on the definitive emergence of consciousness, and immanent in Olson's mythic erection of the pillars of the world, is the person of his genetic father:

... I have been like his stained shingle
ever since Or once or forever It doesn't matter The love I learned
from my father has stood me in good stead
- home stead - I maintained this "strand" to
this very day. My father's And now my own (MIII, p.117)

In book VI of volume II we find a cluster of poems, all of which deal with the separation of the World Parents by the discriminating

consciousness. "Only in the light of consciousness can man know," Neumann declares. "And this act of cognition, of conscious discrimination, sunders the world into opposites, for experience of the world is only possible through opposites" (Origins, p.104). The dichotomies which Olson selects are not always the traditional ones of Earth and Sky. In a poem which dramatizes the overcoming of the unconscious by male guile, he makes the sea his masculine principle, while the moraine of Dogtown retains the maternal character she evinces in Merry's tragedy. Again, it should be kept in mind that the sea and Okeanos are distinct entities in Olson's mythical schema. Father Sea in this poem is, in fact, the Atlantic waters lapping at the shore of Gloucester, and even by his horizontal extent, is easily distinguished from the originative circle of the nine streams. By the ebb and flow of the sea, Olson is able to demonstrate the ego's initially tentative grasp at full consciousness. He reminds us also that the conscious system is inclusive of the powers of speech; his Father brings the polyphony, the potentials of sound by which he will build the walls of his city. And he describes in the sea, the essential "Monogene," an alchemical image for the Son of God.¹⁵ The nascent ego is made aware that it can partake of divinity, only by first mastering the enlightened conscious realm. Thereafter the female Sophia will act as his alembic in selfhood, but it is by the eye and head that he first perceives spiritual possibility. It is thus with a sense of alarm that the embryonic ego watches the dust of the Monogene disperse with the reflux of the tide:

My father
came to the shore
the polyphony
came to the shore

he was as dust
in the water

15. See Psychology and Alchemy, p.104.

the Monogene
was in the water, he was floating
away

oh I wouldn't let my Father
get away (MII, p.147)

Like the suspicious husband of the Algonquin legend who feigns sleep to track his snake-wife furtively, Olson's ego resorts to cunning in order to protect consciousness from the inveiglements of the Great Mother. Significantly, his means is speech:

I cried out
to my Mother
"Turn your head
and quick"

& he came
to the shore
he came to the
City

oh
and I welcomed
him

& was very glad

In an earlier poem included in book VI, the subordination of the unconscious is illustrated both typographically and imagistically. Centrally to the page and poem is set the phrase, "the great Ocean/in balance" (MII, p.126). Consciousness is triumphant, and "the air is as wide as the light." No longer can the Great Mother usurp her original embryo, for the paternal consciousness has incorporated her to himself; she swirls productively in the body cavity, and between consciousness and unconscious there is perfect equilibrium. Thus Olson can conclude the poem with a celebration of the male consciousness on which depends bodily perception:

Okeanos
hangs in the father

the father
is before the beginning of bodily things

The poem entitled "The Frontlet" turns to one of the oldest mythologies in Olson's continuing affirmation of his conscious achievements in Dogtown. Here again the spiritual transformation of self-hood is shown to be dependent on the precedent mastery of consciousness and thus the bull, in Egyptian cosmology representative of the king or dominating male, holds aloft "Our Lady of Good Voyage," the wooden statue of the Virgin Mary who is to aid Olson in his structuring of the mandala. Henri Frankfort's Kingship and the Gods, an interpretation of the myths of Egypt and Mesopotamia in the light of their monarchies, was another work which Olson had paid close attention; Frankfort notes that the bull is symbolic not only of the Egyptian king and fertilizing male, but is also interchangeable with the concept of the "pillar."¹⁶ While Frankfort suggests this may be rooted in a naive phallic symbolism, Olson applies the image more strictly to the actual hierarchical progression of the psyche. Importantly, he does not lose sight of the fact that the bull himself emerges from the body of Mother Dogtown, just as the ego derives from the all-generative unconscious:

into the light
of Portuguese
hill Dogtown

Dogtown's
secret
head
& shoulder

bull's shoulder

lifting Portuguese hill into the light

the body
of Dogtown
holding up Portuguese hill into the light

Our Lady of Good Voyage sitting down on the front of the
unnoticed head and body of Dogtown secretly come to overlook
the City

16. H. Frankfort, Kingship and the Gods (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1948), p.169.

the Lady of Good Voyage held out there
to keep looking out toward the sea
by Dogtown

the Virgin

held up
on the Bull's horns (III, p.145)

The poem which paints most graphically the separation of the World Parents begins simply with the image, "The Cow of Dogtown." Its context is the recurring one of geological process, Olson drawing in this instance, directly from N.S. Shaler's Geology of Cape Ann. He begins with the uroboric state, Shaler's description of Dogtown moraine at least sixty-five feet under the glacial waters. Olson's goal is again to map through an exact correspondence between the physiographical and mythic transformations of the land. Naturally enough, he seizes on Shaler's statement that glacial accumulations are actually traceable on the utmost summit of Dogtown moraine. A basic image of triumphant consciousness, according to Neumann, is the emergence of the Primeval Hill from the uroboric waters (See Great Mother, p.240). In Egyptian mythology this hill is Ptah, the "Risen Land." Out of the glacial waters comes the sediment which layers the hill, and in climbing to the top of Dogtown, Olson can imagine himself on a pinnacle which is doubly the produce of physis. At the summit he is greeted by "clear space and air," the light which is the primary signification of consciousness. In this passage he dwells particularly on the shapes of perceived objects, marvelling at their discrete configurations. The contrast which he suggests between the "overpresence" of the woods and the clear lozenge of Dogtown hill, is an obvious endorsement of sense perception over unconscious embroilments:

... The top of Dogtown
 puts one up into the sky as free-
 ly as it is possible, the extent of
 clear space and air, and the bowl
 of the light...

...One would sit here
 and eat off checker berries, and blue-
 berries in season - they are around
 the place, at this height, one
 like cups and saucers, and moves around to
 eat them, out of one's hands,
 not by getting up but going from
 place to place on one's own behind. Burning
 balsam, or the numerous bushes of bayberry
 one could stay here with the sky
 it feels like as long as one chose; and
 there is enough wildness, or profiles in
 the rocks, the inhabitation of their shapes,
 to supply plenty of company - none of the
 irritation and over-presence of nothing -
 nesses which makes woods, or any
 place else than the kame meadows of
 Dogtown and this bold height of
 it, not as interesting (MII, pp.148-149).

The next stage is, of course, the introduction of the "small
 subglacial/streams," the rills which bring the archetypes to work the
 final transmutation of Dogtown Common. What Olson accomplishes in the
 poem's conclusion is the immaculate positioning of Earth and Sky, Ptah
 and Nut, in their respective realms. As he emphasized in "In Cold Hell,
 in Thicket," Nut as perceived by the mythological consciousness, is a
 perfectly flexed curve. She arches forward over her brother the Earth,
 so that her breasts are accessible for his nourishment. She is the
 Cow of Heaven with which the poem opens. In Egyptian art, the earth
 is most often portrayed as a disc, and thus the separation of the World
 Parents takes on the clarity of distinct geometrical configurations.
 It should not be overlooked that the enunciation of the word "Ptah,"
 with its two initial consonants, requires a forcible expulsion of
 breath. We are thus reminded of the part which speech itself plays in
 Olson's forging of the imago mundi. "Nut is in the world," he concludes,

and the preposition is indicative of definitive psychic achievement. For Merry, Nut was water above and below his world. For Olson, standing aloft on Dogtown Common, she is an integral part of a picture he has himself created:

Nut is over you
 Ptah has replaced the Earth
 the Primeval Hill
 has gone directly
 from the waters
 and the mud
 to the Cow of Heaven
 the Hill stands
 free (MII, p.150)

It is "Maximus, From Dogtown - II," a poem placed very early in the second volume, which delineates the entire individuation process, and so culminates in the Golden Flower which is Gloucester as compact world-picture. Structured in three columns of images, its meaning unfolds only as Maximus IV, V, VI is read in its entirety. One of its central themes is the gradual compression of vegetation to form carbon and ultimately diamond, and in its imagistic condensation, the poetic structure is truly an extension of content. Lacking an awareness of the principal significance which water assumes in the second volume, the reader may find the opening lines of "Dogtown - II" an apparent contradiction of Olson's previous concerns. The Atlantic, celebrated in the first Maximus volume as the youthful America's cornucopia, is absolutely repudiated: "the Sea - turn yr Back on/the Sea, go inland, to/Dogtown..." (p.9). But disgust at man's pollution of both sea and land is a reaction running throughout Olson's work, and that the harbour is now "shitty" is sufficient reason for turning his back. But in the light of psychic imagery, rejection of the sea in favour of the land, is a drive toward achieved consciousness. And unless the established patriarchal faction is overcome, the poem next suggests, the world itself will

succumb to the fate of Gloucester sea and shore. The capitalists whose "smell" he sensed infecting Gloucester as early as "Letter 3," and the self-hugging politicians whom he verbally damns throughout the Reading at Berkeley, are to be felled by Melville's "Princes/of the Husting the sons/who refused to be Denied/the Demon..." Again, Olson resorts to autobiographical material in order to illustrate this psychic patricide. As his father's own life had been a crystallization of the struggle against "the bosses," so he finds in stories of his maternal grandfather, a striking exemplification of productive demonry, seeking always to overcome entrenched power. Consistent with "Dogtown - II's" allusiveness, Olson but evokes his grandfather's name in the poem, breaking the syllables of his name so as to set up correspondences with the hero Jason. But in the later "Grandfather - Father Poem," part of which is included in Archaeologist of Morning, the description of Jonson Hines is sustained:

rolled in the grass
like an overrun horse
or a poor dog
to cool himself
from his employment
in the South Works
of US Steel
as an Irish shoveler

.

stoking
their furnaces
with black
soft
coal soft coal
makes fire
heat higher
sooner,

beloved
Jack Hines (whose picture
in a devil's
cap - black jack
Hines (AM, p.216)

The first section of "Dogtown - II," his psychic progenitors, Olson concludes with a heavy oblique line, thereby signifying the transition

to some further stage of development.

There follows a brief lament on the contamination of the world's waters, "the Atlantic/Mediterranean/Black Sea time," "time" implying the concomitant loss of wonder, and the mythological base. A principal villain in this universal defilement is "Jack Hammond," John Hays Hammond, an American inventor who spawned amongst other devices, the wireless controlled torpedo. Thus Olson surmises: "...there is no sky/space or sea left/earth is interesting." Only earth, with her deeper and more proximate mysteries, escapes the dissipation of her numinous qualities. Earth, ice, and stone: these are all "interesting" to Olson, and as Dogtown resident, these are his immediate and dogmatic conditions. He marvels at the transformation of vegetation to carbon, stating the equation simply as would a child taught a new and wondrous fact: "flowers are/Carbon." And to play upon that equivalence is to bring in his own obsession with geological history. The "Carboniferous" period is defined as the Coal Age, the era in which coal was first extensively formed. "Pennsylvanian" is a term signifying the upper division of the Carboniferous, and both these adjectives enter the field of the poem, recalling the actual process of coal-formation, the intense compression of swamp vegetation. Like the uroboric waters seeping upward through Dogtown, this transformation took place "under" the ground on which Olson stands:

Age
under
Dogtown
the stone

the watered
rock Carbon
flowers, rills

It is yet another instance of the potency of the rill; the swamp vegetation decays because of water and is pressurized, once covered with

moraine deposits.

But the flow of water brings Olson through verbal connection to another of his primary interests, the astrological ages of mankind, and particularly the dawning of Aquarian time. And Christ, as Jung notes, was born the first fish of the age of Pisces,¹⁷ and thus He too enters the poem, representative of the divine son-ship after which Olson himself aspires. As a Catholic, it is the Virgin Mother rather than her son who seems to grip Olson's imagination, although in his very earliest poems there are at least two devoted to the itinerant Galilee fisherman.¹⁸ But within the Maximus series, there is only one reference to Christ prior to "Dogtown - II," and this we have already examined in the poem "Tyrian Businesses." And so Olson curves back to that apocryphal tale of Christ, the disciples, and the dead dog. The gleaming teeth of the dog are for Christ the seeds of resurrection, but in "Dogtown - II," Olson portrays Christ himself picking seeds from his teeth. From the divine son come the seeds of life, but bound into the text of the poem is the alchemical process which aims at individuation, and in alchemy too, seeds are the ultimate mysterium. According to Jung, alchemical research "is pre-eminently concerned with the seed of unity which lies hidden in the chaos of Tiamat and forms the counterpart to the divine unity."¹⁹ The seeds are therefore hidden in the prima materia, the ground of Gloucester, and Olson invokes the peoples who have layered his land with their mythologies.

The Dutch and the Norse, as well as the Algonquin are acknowledged, and he mentions specifically a legend originating in the same volume as

17. Aion - Researches into the Phenomenology of Self, p.90.

18. See AM, pp.6-7, p.41, and p.56.

19. Psychology and Alchemy, p.25.

the tale of the snake-woman. "He-with-the-House-on-his-Head," Olson compresses the moral of the story, which appears in full in the poem entitled "Maximus Letter # whatever" (p.31), and in mantric essence on page 141. The text of the full story is again drawn practically verbatim from Leland's collection. Olson's major contribution, besides the breaking of the prose lines, is the addition of the phrase "chockablock" to the left of the poem. By this he would seem to imply that the tale is as densely packed as is his own "Dogtown - II." It begins, in fact, with a classic demonstration of the practical wisdom born of full consciousness. A man travelling through the woods finds a husband and wife dancing round the trunk of a tree on the top of which is a racoon. When he enquires as to their purpose, they reply that they are trying to dance the tree down so as to catch the animal. Instead of mocking their simplemindedness he tells them of "a new way" to fell a tree; in effect, he initiates them to a higher degree of consciousness, and in payment takes the tanned hide of the racoon. His next encounter is with a man carrying his house on his head, to whom he tells the tale of the dancing husband and wife. The man with his house on his head is apparently fascinated, and offers anything for the racoon skin, including ultimately, the house. To the hero's surprise, the house is extremely light and he carries it on his head as easily as a basket. He enters it to sleep in the evening, and when he awakes it is as though he has been visited by some bountiful spirit: deermeat, hams, and ducks hang from the ceiling, and he himself turns into the partridge of an eternal spring. It is readily understandable why Olson would incorporate this legend repeatedly in a volume devoted to mythic individuation. The image of the house on one's head corresponds remarkably to the "house of flesh" image central to the essay "Human Universe." The ease with which the hero carries the house recalls

Olson's description of the way the contemporary Maya wear their flesh. Both Algonquin and Mayan Indian were cognizant that the body is instrument, and that the proprioceptive acts are a natural outgrowth of organism. But to realize the full potentialities of the body, is to benefit the spirit, and containment within one's own house might well be equivalent to the discovery of the nucleus of the psyche. The legend is "chockablock" in that it compresses consciousness, the fleshly house, and spiritual transformation into one narrative. It is a piece of Gloucester which must ineluctably enter "Dogtown - II," with its ambition to play out individuation on the dogmatic ground.

The poisonous snake-woman also demands inclusion, as does Merry whose assimilation by the grubs is condensed as "The-Grub-Eaten-Fish-Take-the-Smell-Out-of-/The/Air..." It is these grubs, attributes of the maw of the Great Mother, which cleanse the air of the stench of Merry's decomposition, and it is this concept of the air directly around and above us which draws in the Greek noun, ta metarsia. The distinction between ta metarsia and ta meteura, Olson derived from Jane Harrison's Themis;²⁰ ta metarsia signifies the misty air immediately above us, as well as all the phenomena it contains: thunder, rain, clouds, and wind. Ta meteura is the uppermost aither inclusive of sun and moon. Harrison notes that Olympian religion tried vainly to discard the elements of ta metarsia²¹ in worship, and for Olson these attempts merely substantiate his major criticism of Greek thought - the slivering of physis. Thus he affirms:

20. See Themis, p.392.

21. See his inclusion of both terms in MII, p.58.

Dogtown (the Ta metarsia

is the Angel Matter
not to come until (rill!
3000: we will carry water

up the hill the Water the Water to
make the Flower hot - Jack
& Jill will

up Dogtown hill one day the
Vertical American thing will
show from heaven the ladder

come down to the Earth
of Us All, the Many who
know

there is One!
One Mother
One Son

One Daughter
And Each the Father
of Him-Her-Self

Many of the components of this vision are by now familiar: the rill, the carrying of water, the lucid vantage point of Dogtown hill, the ladder which is both the Cinvat Bridge, and Bifrost, the rainbow bridge of the Norse gods. And here Olson makes clear that both man and woman will participate in seeking the unifying seed; both Jack and Jill will make the flower hot by bringing water, by applying mythic intensity so that the flower exfoliates in the heat of its own instancy. Thereafter each will be father to himself. As Neumann explains it:

By the displacement of the center from the ego to the self, the inmost character of the ego is relativized. The personality is no longer wholly identified with the ephemeral ego, but experiences its partial identity with the self, whether this experience take the form of "godlikeness" or of that "cleaving to the godhead" (adherence) of which the mystics speak. The salient feature is that the personality's sense of no longer being identical with the ego prevails over the mortality which clings to egohood... In his victorious struggle the hero proves his godlike descent and he experiences the fulfillment of the primary condition... which is expressed in the mythological formula "I and the Father are one" (Origins, pp.359-360).

The poem's next section initiates a kind of etymological play, and thus physis operates in the poem in a dual aspect: the law of nature manifested in Olson's original interpretation of composition by field, and the process of human individuation which is the instinctual reach of organism. He turns again to the male and female principles from which springs the self:

the Genetic
is Ma the Morphic
is Pa the City is Mother -

Polis, the Child-Made-Man-Woman...

The maternal unconscious as "morphic" is best comprehended by going to the root Morpheus, god of sleep, the "fashioner" as Olson describes him in a letter to Cid Corman (LO, p.104). But out of the mother, the container of all image, comes the male consciousness, and thus the copula is justifiably sustained. Ma is Pa. And polis as we know from the first Maximus, "is eyes" (p.36), and eyes are attributes of the patriarchal realm. It all weaves into the one unity, culminating finally in an identification which Olson may have taken from Jung: "metropolis" is "feminine, like the padma or lotus, the basic form of the lamaistic mandala (the Golden Flower in China and the Rose or Golden Flower in the West). The Son of God, God made manifest, dwells in the flower."²² But he might simply have derived this sense from the roots themselves: "metropolis" is "mother-polis" and truly the walls of the city cannot be erected without her originative waters. "The-Child-Made-Man-Woman" spells out the sequence of individuation: the child-like ego which emerges from the womb of the uroboros, the male consciousness, and finally, the union with the anima by whose grace and succor man comes to self-hood. It is not insignificant that Olson

22. Psychology and Alchemy, p.104.

dedicates the second volume of Maximus to his wife Elizabeth.

Indeed, he enters into "Dogtown - II's" apotheosis by specifying his primary relations to women: he is "Mary's son;" that is, the child of the woman Mary Hines, and "Elizabeth's man," spouse to his own wife, Elizabeth. This correspondence with Christ and John the Baptist no doubt pleased Olson, and is perhaps included as an index of the spirituality latent in any man. But only union with the anima is productive of self-hood, as Neumann makes clear:

It is impossible... to find the treasure [the self] unless the hero has first found and redeemed his own soul, his own feminine counterpart which conceives and brings forth. This inner receptive side is, on the subjective level, the rescued captive, the virgin mother who conceives by the holy wind-ghost and who is at once man's inspiration, his beloved and mother, the enchantress and prophetess... (Origins, p.212).

The Virgin in the first Maximus is quite literally a figurehead; it is the direct gaze of "Our Lady of Good Voyage" which Olson celebrates. She is instructress in the art of fixed attention, and as such she reveals Olson's first volume to be a text devoted to sensory receptivity, the most basic manifestation of consciousness. But in volume II she is invoked both as transcendental principle, the Virgin made fecund by God, and the primal fertilizing earth mother. This compounding of upper and lower functions, although apparently sacrilegious, is wholly consistent with the drive of archetype. Although man regards Sophia, or the Virgin, as the most exalted aspect of the feminine principle, she can never be wholly separated from the elementary character of the womb-vessel: "In accordance with its masculine nature, masculine psychology will look upon Sophia and worship her as the 'highest' aspect of the womanly. But the Great Mother remains true to her essential and eternal and mysterious darkness, in which she is the center of the

mystery of existence."²³ Thus in the last third of volume II, the Virgin appears as Olson's anima, a commingling of spirit and sexuality:

mother-spirit to fuck at noumenon, Vierge
ouvrante

(A Prayer to Our Lady of Good Voyage (MII, p.139))

turn out your
ever-loving arms, Vir-
gin And
Mother

Vulgar
swamp And cow
or sow. Wetlands.
Juice. And in the triple-force
dripping

Orge (MII, p.159)

Recalling Pound's postscript to Remy de Gourmont's Natural Philosophy of Love,²⁴ Olson's version of the Hittite "Song of Ullikummi" makes the sexual act synonymous with visionary enlightenment, "sticks wisdom/unto his mind like his cock/into her" (CM, p.34). And it is with this much desired conjunction that Olson concludes the self-cathartic Reading at Berkeley, extolling the woman who is both lover and anima. His own wife Elizabeth was killed in a car accident in 1964, and it is her loss which underlines the emotional intensity of the Berkeley reading, but it is characteristic of Olson that he transmutes her memory to the refulgent image he offers his audience. As we shall see, the theme of isolation is a most crucial one in the third and final volume of the Maximus.

23. Great Mother, p.321.

24. See, for example, Pound's statement that a man senses his "phallus or spermatozoid [as] charging, head-on, the female chaos... Even oneself has felt it, driving any new idea into the great passive vulva of London, a sensation analogous to the male feeling in copulation."

But it is not only the Virgin and Sophia who convey the transformative power of the feminine in Maximus IV, V, VI. Again Olson draws on childhood memories, those incidents which become ineluctably bonded to archetype. His father's sister Vandla seems to have made a most incisive impression on Olson when a child. She apparently had a goiter on her neck; in the third volume he describes it as an "unoffensive/egg" (p.214), but to the child's mind it must have seemed the very essence of mystery. In "The Twist" he describes the wonderful Christmas presents she gave him each year, mentioning in particular, a paper village. It would seem that one of the houses in this village had a gambrel roof, and for the child the words "goiter" and "gambrel" became somehow inextricable, and wholly identified with Aunt Vandla herself. "The Twist," as we have seen, centres on the St. Valentine Day's storm which initiates volume II, and it is in portraying the uniform whiteness of the landscape that Olson reaches instinctually for the remembered paper village. It is therefore the whiteness of pure transformation of which Aunt Vandla is somehow the agent. Thus in volume II's "Kent Circle Song," she is represented as a mixture of enigmatic compounds, the negative aspect of the Great Mother being also participant. The female attributes of baking and the oven are forever locked with the gingerbread house of Hansel and Gretel's witch, but the oven is simultaneously a symbol of the transformative vessel, and as such Aunt Vandla is precursor to the Virgin:

at My Aunt Vandla's

village a carbuncular

(goiter) gambrel

and Federal

all frilled with lace

and a gold brooch

a silvered handle

in the door

and the walls

all made of cake

and into the oven with her(MII,p.133)

at their throat

Similarly, the poem directly following reinforces the male's exclusion from the female mysteries. It is an evocative anecdote, recalled perhaps from some early stay with Aunt Vandla or another female relative. The woman's scent is all-pervasive, and the verb Olson selects highly appropriate, for it is an initiation to a world of transcendental promise:

I swung out, at 8 or 10
waking to the bedroom wall
and the sweet smell of toilet soap
in the house at Wellesley Hills (MII, p.134)

While subtly sardonic, the poem outlining the aims of "The Young Ladies Independent Society of East Gloucester," is at the same time a very full description of the function of the anima. Gloucester history is again bound into Olson's personal exploration of self-hood:

The Young Ladies
Independent Society
of East Gloucester
has arisen
from the flames:

the Sodality
of the Female Rule
has been
declared: We will Love
with Kisses

Each Other; and Serve Man
as Our child (MII, p.82)

But "Dogtown - II's" inclusion of Elizabeth Olson is the inclusion of the poet's most personalized anima figure, and from her he turns naturally to the "monogene," the divine sonship which he will achieve once unified with his female half. He returns to etymological play in the poem's next phrase grouping. The "Kolla" of "collagen," a root he twice capitalizes, is Greek for glue, and it is of course, the whole

tenor of Maximus IV, V, VI to seek an absolute coinherence. But "collagen" also has a very specific physiological meaning in addition to the more general implications of the collage, or cohesiveness at which individuation aims. In Webster's Collegiate it is defined as "an insoluble fibrous protein that occurs in vertebrates as the chief constituent of connective tissue fibrils and in bones and yields gelatin and glue on prolonged heating with water" (p.162). For Olson, it becomes a further validation of his conviction that the body is innately equipped to create a world-structure. The chemical reaction when water is applied has a Paracelsian correspondence to the mythic process, and having affirmed by an oblique westward tending line that the land is properly our dogmatic condition, Olson goes on to a highly condensed mytho-chemical résumé:

the greater the water you add
the greater the decomposition
so long as the agent is protein
the carbon of four is the corners

This apparently does not elucidate any particular chemical reaction. Olson seems rather to be combining the notion of the body's resilient glue with the transformation of vegetation to carbon, which he centres on earlier in the poem. Carbon is, in fact, a most fitting image for the mythic process. In the first place, it is very widely distributed in nature, and mythic creativity is just as accessible to mankind at large. Like several other of the elements, it exists in allotropic forms; that is, although they have totally different properties, they consist of carbon and nothing else. Graphite and diamond are two obvious examples. Moreover, carbon is chemically unique in that it can form an almost infinite series of compounds, and so the mythic materials of the world can be bonded from any number of vantage points,

or any variety of dogmatic conditions. It is also true that despite the addition of water, the essential carbon atom remains unchanged whether it be graphite or diamond. The carbon atom has four electrons on its outer shell, and Olson would be well aware of the alchemical significance of the quaternity. Jung, for example, sees the "four corners of the world" as archetypally derived, built-in as it is to physis:

It would seem... that there is normally a clear insistence on four, as if there were a greater statistical possibility of four. Now it is a curious "sport of nature" that the chief chemical constituent of organic bodies is carbon, which is characterized by four valences; also it is well known that the diamond is a carbon crystal. Carbon is black - coal, graphite - but the diamond is "purest water."²⁵

But indeed it is the stable quaternity, the world's four corners, at which mythic process aims, and the addition of Okeanos' waters to Dogtown meadows will inevitably result in the unification of the firmament. The important qualification is, of course, that the agent be "protein;" that is, man himself, for protein is the chief constituent of all living cells. And these very cells, Olson is delighted to discover, themselves contain the glue of creation. The poem turns next to an almost lyric celebration of Orpheus as first poet of wonder. Dogtown's cosmogonic potential is reaffirmed, as is the requisite left side of Ocean:

in stately motion to sing in high bitch voice the fables
of wood and stone and man and woman loved

and loving in the snow
and sun

the weather

on Dogtown
is protogonic but the other side of heaven
is Ocean

filled in the flower the weather
on Dogtown the other side of heaven
is Ocean

25. Psychology and Alchemy, pp.208-9.

And it is the Annisquam River bounding Gloucester on one side, which Olson sees as originally productive in the Carboniferous period. The water seeps upward from "under" Dogtown, thus resulting in the soft black coal which is like Love in all its receptivity and porousness. "Heaven," Olson clarifies in the third volume, "...is/Mind (drawn to/ Gloucester/From the surrounding water//On four sides/..." (p.86). Quoting an Indian shaman, Olson had described the stone as "the truest condition of creation" in Causal Mythology (p.12), and so it is that he conceives of the heart, the root of breath and self, as a blackened stone. As well as reincorporating the transfigurative potential of carbon, the blackness may well refer to the uncertain context in which we create. "Dogtown - II's" conclusion may, in fact, be a poetic transliteration of a passage from Neumann, who in his Origins and History of Consciousness, collates several possible images of achieved self-hood, amongst them the flower and the stone:

The genesis, stabilization, configuration, and consolidation of the personality are therefore associated with a symbolism whose ingredients are perfect form, balance, harmony, solidity. The mandala whether appearing as the circle, sphere, pearl, or symmetrical flower, contains all these elements; while diamond, stone, or rock, as symbol of the self, represent the indestructibility and permanence of something that can no longer be split apart by the opposites (p.416).

Thus indistinguishable from the indivisible self is the imago mundi manifest in the Chrysanthemum, in Greek, literally the Golden Flower. And according to Wilhelm's translation of the Buddhist text, The Secret of the Golden Flower, "the light-flower of heaven and earth fills all the thousand spaces." But the darkness of the origination condition must never be lost sight of, according to Olson, for process demands a

26. Richard Wilhelm, trans., The Secret of the Golden Flower (1931; rpt. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), p.33.

continuing reconstitution of the mandala. On this point Olson differs most radically from the Jungian school. Nevertheless, he cannot conclude the poem without once again acknowledging the imagery instinctual to man which is comprised by Okeanos:

Heart to be turned to Black	
Stone	the Black Chrysanthemum
is the Throne of Creation	Ocean

is the Black Gold Flower

Maximus IV, V, VI is a book built upon water, and it thus closes not so much with Melville's Ishmael, as with Charles Olson, stable in a four-cornered box, the waters of Okeanos stored safely "under" him. But as we stressed previously, his possible vectors of attention are limitless, and the absence of horizons in this final poem denotes the open-endedness of creation:

I set out now
in a box upon the sea (MII, p.203)

It is a volume of poetry dedicated to the unification of materials. The glyph, "tesserae/commisure" (p.99), set slightly off-centre on the page, is a hinge image, coming almost exactly in the middle of the book. We find this same mosaic theme in two of the volume's sequent dream-poems:

All night long
I was a Eumolpidae 27
as I slept
putting things together
which had not previously
fit (MII, p.157)

I looked up and saw
its form
through everything
- it is sewn
in all parts, under
and over (MII, p.173)

27. In Greek mythology, Eumolpus, a son of Poseidon, is credited with the founding of the Eleusinian mysteries consecrated to Demeter. The hereditary guardians of the mysteries are called Eumolpidae.

The second of these poems derives from the root of "rhapsody," which Olson had previously exploited in the first Maximus. Rhaptein is literally "to sew together,"²⁸ and as the part of an epic intended for recitation, rhapsody binds in the essential place of breath in Olson's mythic creation.

Perhaps one of the ^{most}/revealing pieces in Maximus IV, V, VI, is Olson's "Prayer to the Lord," who is Himself worshipping at Dante's tomb. Dante had pieced together Earth, Heaven, and Hell, as Olson would himself in the most perfect proprioceptive act. And through a strange juxtaposition, Olson does include his personal body in this prayer. Satirizing his own bulk, as well as the most blatant symbol of American materialism, he becomes a White Cadillac directing his will through Dogtown. By such drive he may hope to approximate the Dantean achievement, and draw forth from the uroboric waters the orb which is both self and world. Dante and the divine Creator are shown to be co-equals, and Olson a valiant successor in world-making:

A Prayer, to the Lord, cast down like a good old Catholic,
on the floor of San Vitale, next to Dante's tomb, in the
midst of the mast/bast of the construction

so I can get on with it,
my great White Cadillac driving through Dogtown (MII, p.43)

28. See MI, p.68.

Chapter Seven

Typhon and the Boundaries of Creation

"[T]hat the Mind or Will always/successfully opposes & invades the Previous..." (MIII, p.176) is Olson's poetic rendition of process. For Whitehead, "decay, transition loss, and displacement belong to the essence of the Creative Advance,"¹ and Olson could not build a world out of Dogtown Common without incorporating the very principle of its destruction. Since actuality is process by definition, there can be no ultimately perfected imago mundi, or at least, there can only be that which each instant determines. Of this Olson had philosophical substantiation from Whitehead, experimental corroboration from contemporary physics, as well as the confirmation of phenomenology; we have seen, for example, that Merleau-Ponty conceives perception as "the re-creation or re-constitution of the world at every moment..."² Thus the demonic principle receives the most reverential treatment in Olson's cosmology.

The "successful invasion of the Previous" is naturally extended to his own poetic corpus. Like Beauty who does "not stay long" (AM, p.80), Olson cautions himself against succumbing to the established attitudes of his own earlier work. The continuous permutations of the perceived world demand a constant restructuring of the picture of Gloucester. Such a self-warning is included very early in Maximus IV, V, VI, the poet envisioning his prior Maximus pieces as seductive siren songs. Against this lure of the previous he opposes the demand of an immediate condition; the very turning of a country road can dramatically qualify the nexus of material which is Gloucester:

1. Adventures in Ideas, p.368.

2. Phenomenology of Perception, p.207.

a Maximus song
 the sirens sang:
 he stopped his
 ears with caulking
 compound he listened
 he travelled
 he went he passed
 he went in and out of wood
 the bugs sang grand
 birds led him on a
 paradise alley (some country roads
 have trees growing and the road
 turns in such a way it is special,
 for a few feet (MII, p.8)

Indeed, directly following on "Maximus From Dogtown - II" Olson includes a poem publicizing his intention to break up the cosmic orders he had demonstrated in the first volume of Maximus. In chapter three we looked in detail at "Tyrian Businesses," a paeon to the body as instrument, and as such a very crucial poem within the first Maximus series. "Tyrian Businesses" concludes with a definition of felicity as living "in accordance with" the laws of physis. The poem's summary image is the fylfot, or swastika, the ancient sign depicting the clockwise course of the sun, and symbolizing luck. But in volume II Olson directly contradicts the non-interference celebrated by "Tyrian Businesses." After Special View (1956), with its philosophical considerations of man's inescapable context of uncertainty, Olson came to see our relation to nature as requiring much more than a reverential conformity to implicit laws. The darkness into which we are born, the shifting ground of relativity, and the evasive character of the electron, all demand that man act positively, so as to stabilize and unify a world-structure. Nature thus becomes a kind of unreflected surface for Olson, and it is the human duty to make of her "a shining monsterness" (AM, p.25). But since the very mind of man and his natural powers, are included by the Greeks in their definition of physis, the imaginative transmutation of visible phenomena is the other half of the natural

process. Thus "Maximus, to himself, as of 'Phoenicians,'" volume II's refutation of "Tyrian Businesses," begins with the shattering of the fylfot, the sign for passive conformity:

the fylfot
she look like
who called herself
luck: svas -

tika BREAK HER up as the lumber
was broken up in the screw The mess of it astern
And the ship NOT the vessel NOT fall like dead
in the water (MII, p.10)

We will recall that "Tyrian Businesses" relies on the parable of "Moulton's folly" in order to demonstrate the consequences of directly thwarting nature's laws. The skipper Moulton, anxious to snatch free-floating timber from the sea, either forgets or ignores the law of the metacentre and his own vessel "fall[s] like dead" in the waters. But Olson's purpose is now to affirm the act of "breaking up," the demonic principle which will, in fact, allow his vessel to right itself immediately and move on to a further creation. It is revealing that Olson purposely avoided the more common word, swastika, in the earlier "Tyrian Businesses" since not even etymology could overcome the negative connotations imposed by recent history. Its inclusion in the refutation does succeed in dissolving the cosmic vision of six years previous, and Olson concludes this negation of passive concordance, with the condition of blackness, and the padma or lotus which is before all things:

... The SWASTIKA

broken up: the padma
is what was there BEFORE
one was. Is there. Will be. Is what ALL
issues from: The GOLD
flower All the heavens,
a few miles up - and even with the sun out -
is BLACK

It is Olson's "Maximus, From Dogtown - IV" which gives dramatic embodiment to the demonic principle operant in physis. In the fifth chapter we remarked on his unusual analysis of the ancient Phoenician cosmology in Special View; by a substitution of terms he was able to show a generative human appetite implicit in the text of the myth. In "Dogtown - IV" he attempts a similar coup, using as his source text, Hesiod's Theogony. The superficial reading of Hesiod's Typhon is that he is but a troublesome monster, justifiably cast out by Zeus. But Olson "makes up" Typhon's story so that the very structure of the world is seen to depend on his dynamism. The invasion of the previous, the ingression of new data, is the very essence of process, and this Olson would illustrate mythologically through the person of Typhon.

"Dogtown - IV" as Olson admits in Poetry and Truth, is in many ways an unsuccessful poem; at Beloit he footnoted his own reading of the piece somewhat in exasperation: "... there's something there, but it's on the page if it's there at all" (PT, p.33). Part of the problem may be that Olson's own appetite in generating the poem was excessive; he attempts to pull in the Norse thread, as well as explicit scientific references, and it is particularly the latter which remains extrinsic to the structure. For example, shortly after the poem's opening primal setting, Olson attempts to move from the first semi-human sons of the Hesiodic Earth and Heaven (Gaia and Uranos), to one of the most mysterious constants in contemporary physical science. The connecting link is a weak one at best: Briareos, the son of Mother Earth, is known by the epithet "hundred-handed" and so becomes for Olson synonymous with "the power - 100." And "one of the two/pure numbers out of which the world/is constructed" (MII, p.163), is "the reciprocal $\frac{1}{137}$," a pure dimensionless number indicating the square of the elementary electrical

charge e. This information Olson took from one of Weyl's appendices to Philosophy of Mathematics and Natural Science, and it was perhaps the fact that $\frac{1}{137}$ is a pure number expressive of the enigma at the very root of matter which led him to include it in a poem of origins. But the reality of the mythic personae, the Titan Cronus locked in the prison Tartarós, and Earth as massive cow-body, sits uncomfortably with the abstractness of number. It is a poetic occasion in which Olson transgresses completely the laws of field:

....our father who is also in
 Tartarós chained in being
 kept watch on by Aegean -
 O'Briareos whose exceeding
 manhood (excellent manhood
 comeliness
 and power - 100 or possibly
 to use the term of change (with
 the reciprocal $\frac{1}{137}$ one of the two
 pure numbers out of which the world
 is constructed

(the other one is

'Earth' mass mother milk cow body (MII, p.163)

But the descriptions of the depths of Tartarós itself, and of Zeus' battle with Typhon, contribute to the poem's emergent demonstration. Remembered phrases from Evelyn-White's translation enter ineluctably, and the poem's most successful passages are truly exemplifications of composition by field. Within the course of the Theogony, Tartarós is repeatedly made the repository for those individuals who offend the gods. Uranos, the god of Heaven, is the first to confine his rebellious sons,

the Cyclopes, in Tartarós. Gaia persuades her sons the Titans to rebel against their father, and so Cronus succeeds in castrating Uranos. However, once Cronus assumes complete command, he too repeats the pattern and orders the Cyclopes whom he had released, back to Tartarós along with the hundred-handed ones, Briareos, Cottus, and Gyes, also sons of Gaia. And in order to overcome his father Cronus, the crafty Zeus releases all the rebellious sons, and following the decisive battle, Cronus is himself confined to Tartarós. The successive defeats of the patriarchal faction naturally bring to mind Neumann's archetypal stage of the slaying of the Father, and in this sequence of iconoclastic heroes, Typhon is perhaps the most classical demonstration. It is his fate, once defeated by Zeus, to remain forever chafing in the gloom of Tartarós, and accompanying him is Cronus, the second deposed Father of mankind. It is with Cronus that Olson begins "Dogtown - IV:" "... our father who is also in/Tartarós chained in being." Thus both a god and a monster are chained within the same confines. The obvious question prompted by "Dogtown - IV" is, what is Tartarós?

It is certainly not hell, a point which Olson stresses in the poem. Hesiod himself centres on its virtually fathomless depths, as well as the fact that it is situated at the very "sources and ends of earth:"

For a brazen anvil falling down from heaven nine
nights and days would reach the earth upon the tenth;
and again a brazen anvil falling from earth nine nights
and days would reach Tartarus on the tenth. Round it
runs a fence of bronze, and night spreads in triple line
all about it like a neck-circlet, while above grow the
roots of earth and unfruitful sea. There by the counsel
of Zeus who drives the clouds the Titan gods are hidden
under misty gloom, in a dank place where are the ends of
huge earth.

And there all in their order, are the sources and
ends of gloomy earth and misty Tartarus, and the unfruitful
sea and starry heaven, loathsome and dank, which even the
gods abhor. It is a great gulf, and if once a man were

within the gates, he would not reach the floor until a whole year had reached its end, but cruel blast upon blast would carry him this way and that. And this marvel is awful even to the deathless gods. 3

Olson owes much to this translation of Evelyn-White, but in his peculiar interpretation of Tartarós, it is possible that he draws also on Paul Tillich's treatment of the demonic. In his Special View, Olson cites Tillich's Interpretation of History as unique in its inclusion of the supernatural or demonic element, and we find in Tillich an image of the inexhaustibility at the root of things, not unlike the bottomless gulf of Tartarós:

... the depth of things, their basis of existence, is at the same time their abyss; or in other words... the depth of things is inexhaustible. [This] inexhaustibility... is not to be interpreted as passive inexhaustibility, as a resting ocean, which any subject, form or world fails to exhaust, but it is to be understood as an active inexhaustibility, as a productive inner infinity of existence... (pp.83-84)

Whether or not Tillich's conception of the actively inexhaustible abyss directly influenced Olson's view of Tartarós, is difficult to establish. But revealingly, "Dogtown - IV's" first description of Tartarós swings out from the concept of "the statistical." The statistical is, in fact, equated with Tartaros. Both stand "outside/ the Stream" of Okeanos which binds in the consistency of the ordered, imagined world. As we saw in the discussion of the "Uncertainty Principle," statistical evidence has supplanted causation in the realm of microphysics. Man can no longer predict results with absolute certainty. Thus statistical studies preclude no possibility; rather, they posit a world of micro-physical events which is open-ended. We might well think of Tartarós as fields within fields of possibility. Again Olson relies on the adverb "under" in order to elucidate the

volcanic potency which lies just outside the verges of immediately established creation. As the waters flowing beneath Dogtown Common seep upwards to modify the physiography, so beneath the orb spontaneously made, lies a fathomless potentiality for change. Olson had phrased it somewhat differently in Special View: "And the only way the Will can be seen to be positive, and thus creative, is when it does not fall back to Understanding, but keeps the verbal force of the Dialectical (change) and thus sits above or outside or under, asymmetrical [sic] to both Power and the Good" (pp.45-46). The image of asymmetry is to become an important one in Olson's mythos, but consistent with Hesiod's telling, Tartaros is "under" the earth, the measureless repository of the rebellious ones who strain and hunger:

the statistical

(stands)

outside

the Stream, Tartarós

is beyond

the gods beyond hunger outside

the ends and source of Earth

Heaven Ocean's

Stream...

.

/in other words below below - below

is a factor of being, underneath

is a matter this is like the vault

you aren't all train

of Heaven it counts

if you leave out those roots of Earth

which run down through Ocean to

the ends of Ocean as well

the foundations of Ocean

- by Earth's prompting

and the advice of Heaven, his grandparents, this person
Zeus put the iotunns those who

strain

reach out are

hunger

put em outside... (MII, pp.164-165)

The iotunns as Murray Fowler points out in his essay, "Old Norse Religion," are usually translated as "giants," but actually denote the "devourer" or simply "eater." Repeatedly, and in varying mythologies, Olson stumbles on the originative appetite woven directly into cosmogony. But Tartarós is not to be confused with hunger. It contains those beings who do hunger, and are thus productive of all possible creation, but as Olson makes clear, the temporal sequence is hunger, Earth, and then Tartarós: "...Tartarós/was next after Earth (as Earth/was next after hunger/itself..."(MII,p.167). Given any creation of earth through appetite, new data will immediately invade the established condition. Creative possibility is always working at the edges of the orb.

Typhon is the child of Mother Earth and Tartarós, and as Hesiod makes clear and Olson is quick to follow, the monster's conception is "by the aid of golden Aphrodite."⁴ He is thus a natural rather than an unnatural product. According to Hesiod, Aphrodite endows Typhon with great strength in both his hands and his feet, and significantly these are organs of man's volition. Perhaps his most terrible peculiarity is the hundred snake heads which grow from his shoulders. In his long description of Typhon Olson qualifies that these snake heads are "made of all the virtues/of Ocean's/children..."(p.166). Indeed, the heads utter every conceivable sound; Evelyn-White translates: "And there were voices in all his dreadful heads which uttered every kind of sound unspeakable,"⁴ and in his own depiction,

4. Homeric Hymns, p.139.

Olson questions whether they were not, in fact, sounds which only gods could comprehend. Typhon hisses, roars like a lion, bellows like a bull, and imitates the cries of a whelping mother. He runs the gamut of primordial experience, and in giving expression to the whole range of animality, Olson sees him as the energized embodiment of archetype. His many tongues are dark and flickering and his eyes flash fire. Perhaps a variation on the polyphonous monogene whom Olson sought to rescue from the waters, Typhon is also the excited potentiality of language; as Robert Dunn describes "... a disturbance of words within words/that is a field folded."⁵ By his very monstrous aspect, Typhon embodies the roughnesses which Olson saw necessarily chipping at the gloss of the established ideal, or indeed, the established imago mundi. His snake-eyes flash perceptual heat. In Typhon, therefore, Olson found a ready-made personification of the urgency to self-creation which Whitehead saw as transcending the universe; the monster's eyes and tongues are vectors:

her last one, by love of Tartarós,
by the aid of Love as Aphrodite made
strength in his hands and untiring
feet - and made of all the virtues
of Ocean's
children - snakes a hundred heads
(a 'fearful "dragon") dark flickering tongues
the eyes in his marvelous heads 'flashed
"fire," and fire burned from his heads,
when he looked (at the enemy or
as Shakti was shooting
beams of love directly
into the woman he wanted to be
full of love) and there are 'voices'
inside all his dreadful heads

uttering every kind of sound (imaginable?
 unspeakable Hugh White says Hesiod
 says (not to be voiced?

for at one time they made sounds
 such as solely the gods
 caught on to
 but at another Typhon
 was a bull
 when letting
 out his
 nature, at another
 the relentless lion's
 heart's sound

and at another sounds
 like whelps, wonderful to hear
 and again, at another, he would hiss
 so the sky would burn (MII, pp.165-167)

Typhon exemplifies the classical function of the hero, and challenges Zeus, the highest of the Olympian pantheon. His purpose, according to Olson, is "to give the gods a scare/who would have come to reign over mortals/and immortals" (MII, p.170). We have seen that Olson would turn his back on God, so as to permit the ongoing movement of creation, and it is this seething at the root of all orders, that Typhon would exhibit for the world. It is Zeus who conquers, however, and he hurls Typhon back into the earth with such force that the monster scorches his mother. Her face is permanently indented, scarred by the living heat which is her son. This physiographical change, as Olson points out, is as natural as are the gougings wrought by lava. Zeus, in his anger, banishes Typhon eternally to dwell with his father, Tartarós. But the monster's confinement for all eternity, surging beneath the "source and ends" of earth,

is the guaranteed continuance of process:

he burned all the marvellous heads of the monster
and conquered him and lashed him
and threw him done in his mother,
who groaned

and a great part of her melted
as tin does from the heat of him blasted
where Zeus had tossed him

.....

The life-giving earth
had crashed around in burning
the previous time when all the land had seethed
and Ocean's streams and the sea
had boiled... (MII, pp.170-171)

"It is with EROS that mythology is concerned," Olson states simply in Special View (p.54), and Eros is desire. And it is the fact that Typhon was compounded with Eros presiding, which seals for Olson, his integral role in physis. He is in-bound to process, the flickering tongues bespeaking the inexhaustibility of potential. The urge to ever further self-creation is the desire of man, and we too are dependent on his demonism. The concluding lines of "Dogtown - IV" are thus weighted with awe and reverence:

Love accompanied Tartarós
when with Earth in love he made
Typhon (MII, p.172)

"Dogtown - IV" is set very close to the end of Maximus IV, V, VI, for only having instructed his reader fully in the mysteries of mythic process, could Olson confront him with the fact that the imago mundi so dearly made, must be destroyed and reworked instant by instant. But the person of Typhon does appear in several of the volume's earlier poems.

In a piece beginning with perhaps the most crucial verb in Olson's vocabulary, Typhon's siege of "the bosses" is played out against that of the poet:

to travel Typhon
 from the old holdings

 from taking the Old Man's
 sinews out and hiding them under

 the bear rug, from Sister
 Delphyne

 who listens too easily
 to music, from Ma

 who is always there
 and get that building up

 at the corner of
 Grapevine Road & Hawthorne Lane

 with Simp Lyle
 for manager (MLI, p.95)

The source of this particular myth is not Hesiod, and Olson undoubtedly found the material in Robert Graves' Greek Myths.⁶ An elaboration on Typhon's struggle with Zeus reveals that the monster was initially successful, literally immobilizing the almighty God by removing the sinews of his hands and feet, and entrusting him to the guardianship of his sister-monster Delphyne. Sister Delphyne, as Olson states prosaically in the poem "listens too easily to music;" she is duped by Cadmus who tells her he needs the sinews for lyre-strings so that he may delight her with song. "To travel Typhon" is the essence of productive energy, and in this poem the infinitive manifests itself in the slaying of the patriarch, and the hero's erection of a stable and vertical ego at some prominent Gloucester intersection.

In a poem just previous, Typhon's movements are identified with the restless westward migration of mankind, the oblique leftward tending line. Originating from Mount Casius, and the cave near the Orontes River where

6. See Graves, The Greek Myths (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), I, p.134.

Typhon grappled with Zeus, the movement duplicates exactly man's primary settlements and culminates, naturally enough, in the "grapevine corner" of Gloucester, Massachusetts. And there, Olson tells us, the monster shakes off his cave-life and emerges to instruct Gloucestermen in the necessity of dynamism:

after the storm was over
out from his cave at Mt Casius
came the blue monster

covered with scales
and sores about his mouth
flashing not too surely

his tail but with his eyes
showing some glare
rowing out gently

into the stream, to go
for Malta, to pass by
Rhodes and Crete

to arrive at Ireland
anyway to get into the Atlantic
to make up a boil

in northeastern waters
to land in a
grapevine corner

to shake off his cave-life
and open an opening
big enough for himself (MII, p.94)

Indeed, "to travel Typhon" is a verb implicit in "Letter #41," the prolegomena piece to volume II. Olson's leap from his mother's porch into the massed whiteness of the St. Valentine Day's storm is "Like, right off the Orontes?" (MII, p.1). Olson inserts it as a question, but "Dogtown - IV" is corroboration that a leap like Typhon's spells creative advance.

And it is thus in volume II's imitation of Pausanias, the historian who enumerated every one of Athen's landmarks and geographical peculiarities, that Olson makes a child of Typhon intrinsic to Gloucester.

The Lernean Hydra was a many-headed water serpent, spawned by Typhon and his half-serpent half-woman spouse, Echidne. And it is this offspring of Typhon whom Olson describes in his Pausanias piece as inspiring "the particular worship of the city." Olson could not leave the demonic principle out of Gloucester's monuments:

... The city's own
wooden image of the goddess is on a hill
along the next ridge above Middle Street
between the two towers of a church called
the Lady of Good Voyage. There is also a stone image
of Aphrodite beside the sea. 2. But the
spot where the river comes into the
sea is reserved for the special
Hydra called the Lernean monster,
the particular worship of the city (MII, p.84)

It is no coincidence that both the demonic principle and the non-differentiated unconscious take snake form, for they have an identity in their fathomless potential for creation. The hydra is thus justifiably ensconced in Gloucester's harbour waters, while her father rages at the edges of the world.

But if the snake-headed children are images of demonic resurgence, so the dog assumes an increasing importance as Olson's primary demonic glyph. It is probable that his interest in the mythological associations of the dog or wolf, stemmed from the very name of Dogtown. Choosing Dogtown Common as the seat of the psychic drama, he was bound to exploit the potential hidden in the syllables. In "Later Tyrian Businesses" (MII, p.36), he works the obvious anagram, "God the Dog," a phrase not so far fetched if his mythic creation does, in fact, contribute to the self-creation of God. In addition, there is the association with his own recurring image of Gloucester's "dog-rocks," by which he steers his fragile craft in "ABC(2)." This threat of destruction puts the dog-rocks clearly into the demonic body of imagery. And we have

frequently noted the apocryphal parable of Christ and the dead dog whose teeth are the gleaming seed-corns, Whitehead's objective immortality. For Olson this parable becomes synonymous with resurrection, the activation of new form which is the essence of the demonic. Again he is quick to bind in any historical or mythological references to the dog. In "The Feathered Bird of the Harbor of Gloucester" which records the sighting of the great snake just off Ten Pound Island, he concludes jubilantly with the fact that the serpent's head was "rounded like a dog's" (MIII, p.60). And he would undoubtedly be aware, of Graves' notation in The Greek Myths that the Hydra had "a prodigious dog-like body."⁷ Nor can we consider these correspondences forced, for Olson probably stumbled on them in his reading, and they would make their own way into the mythic field he encouraged on Dogtown Common.

It is volume III of Maximus in which the dog becomes a major structuring image. In a poem compounding his father's archetypal rebellion with that of Gloucester's first carpenter, William Stevens, the demonic principle is treated both philosophically and mythologically, the Norse wolf, Fenris, being introduced to the imago mundi for the first time. While Karl Olson's struggle with the bosses eventually killed him, William Stevens, having repudiated the rule of Charles II in favour of a life in Massachusetts, survived to a praiseworthy productivity. Their archetypal precursor, Fenris, is the Norse variation on Typhon and Tartarós. His jaws gape from earth to heaven, and he becomes so fierce that the gods decide he must be bound. He snaps every fetter laid upon him until the dwarves forge a chain "made from the secret and impalpable things of the world - the roots of mountain, the noise of a moving cat, and the breath of a fish."⁸ The only god sufficiently daring to bind

7. The Greek Myths, II, p.60.

8. H.R. Ellis Davidson, Gods and Myths of Northern Europe (1964; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1964), p.31.

him is Tyr, he who gives victory in battle, but unfortunately Fenris bites off his hand in the process. This mutilation also becomes an important theme in the third volume, but in this first poem, "Stevens song," it is Fenris who predominates:

On the side
of the King the Father

there sits a wolf
which is not his own will

which comes from outside
it is not true

that the demon
is a poison in the blood

only, he is also
a principle

in creation, and enters unknown
to the being, he is different

it is true
from the angel but only

because he travels even further
to get inside, and is not bearing

light or color, or fruits, not one garden
ever a garden ever a walled place

not anything resembling Paradise (MIII, p.31)

While the angel is implicit in the very matter of creation, the demon must enter from outside, his penetration of the orb qualifying its condition for all time. He bears no vatic tokens, but his disruption of the orders enable the garden to be built anew. Where neither Fenris nor Typhon breaks in, the garden decays in its own ideality. Towards the poem's conclusion, Olson joins with Fenris two disparate images, all playing upon the idea of sudden penetration. As his own body enters the woman in sexual union, he becomes the jaw of Fenris, engaging in the opening of a new world. And perhaps the most natural correspondence to spring to mind is a personal anecdote; on his summer spent as a

mailman in order to help finance his studies at university, Olson had had to cope with the occupational hazard of violent dogs. Both physical pain, and ecstasy in love, can break the world open. As Olson puts it, the habitually known structure becomes "pieces" and "holes," and we are charged with the task of making it a unity once again:

... I was
 a dog who had
 bitten into
 her body
 as it was joined
 to mine
 naturally,
 in normal bedstead
 fashion, no excessive
 facts here, no special
 or sought meaning
 no more than
 that
 the demon
 the canine
 head piercing
 right through the letter carrier
 trousers and into the
 bone, the teeth of Fenris
 craves and locks
 directly
 into
 the flesh, there isn't
 any room
 except for
 pieces, holes
 are left (MLIII, pp.33-34)

"Mutilation is the condition of all creation," Erich Neumann states in his Origins and History of Consciousness (p.121). His point of

reference is explicitly the emergent heroes who must undergo maiming and even castration, in their battle with the unconscious. But the statement is directly applicable to the amputated hand of Tyr, a bloody reminder of the indispensability of the demonic in natural and psychic process. Minus a hand, Tyr is asymmetrical and we have noted Olson's conviction in Special View that man can sustain his creativity only by positing the will asymmetrically to the Power and the Good (p.46). Amputation of the proportional body amounts to a roughening of the ideal, and is thus the assurance of ongoing activity. One of volume III's most apparently cryptic poems is therefore seen to be the simple presentation of the two halves of creation. "Space and time" are the "saliva" in the mouth of man, that very secretion which permits speech, and thus the articulation of the perceived world. Saliva is therefore an essential part of creativity, just as are the events comprised by the mesh of the space-time continuum. The other half of the picture is Typhon/Fenris, our own hand contained in the mouth of the dog. By our condition of mutilation, we recognize the necessity of destroying what has only just been made:

Space and Time the saliva
in the mouth

your own living hand amputated living on
in the mouth

of the Dog (MIII, p.47)

But conversely, in the moments of self-realization and the instant's unfolding of the mandala, the hand is once again joined to the body. Fenris slinks away, salivating in preparation for the next incisive grip:

The Wolf
slinks off,

Fenrir's 9
mouth

9. Olson refers to the dog both as Fenris and Fenrir. Both forms occur in translations of the Norse.

salivarating [sic]

And my arm

on my own body,

my own hand

mine (MIII, p.63)

Mutilation is the condition of Olson's Enyalion, or more properly Enyalios, the Mycenaean version of Mars the war god. The Enyalion poem is, in fact, introduced by the straining dog of Tartarós, Typhon and Fenris melded in a unity of purpose. And Enyalion is a productive embodiment of their ferment. Olson equates him with "the law of possibility," and importantly, "he goes to war with a picture." He is the agitator capable of all possible manifestations of the imago mundi, and his war-like nature ensures that no single picture will endure long. Enyalion is the natural completion of one of Olson's most beautiful early poems, "The Ring Of," in which Venus takes to her bed the maimed Vulcan¹⁰ and the aggressive Mars. By coupling with roughness and possibility, she protects the quick-silver life which guarantees her continued beauty. Thus Olson brings the two roughnesses to chafe in the person of Enyalion, who is dedicated to the disruption of order, and who has lost his hand. Enyalion is thus a disciplined Typhon, the indiscriminate raging applied purposefully to the making of a "brown-red" world:

rages
strain
Dog of Tartarus
Guards of Tartarus
Finks of the Bosses War Makers

not Enyalion. Enyalion

has lost his Hand, Enyalion
is beautiful, Enyalion
has shown himself, the High King

10. See the poem (MIII, p.49) which establishes Vulcan's "connection to/ the Dogs."

a War Chief, he has Equites
to do that

Enyalion
is possibility, all men
are the glories of Hera by possibility, Enyalion
goes to war differently
than his equites, different
than they do, he goes to war with a picture

far far out into Eternity Enyalion,
the law of possibility, Enyalion

the beautiful one, Enyalion (MIII, p.38)

But to be aware of Tartarós just outside tempering creation, is to ask where are the boundaries of the world. This becomes a most important question in Maximus IV, V, VI, and the poem "Gravelly Hill" is dedicated to locating these "sources and ends." Olson begins his investigation with an appropriate quotation from the Theogony, "at the boundary of the mighty world," and then immediately draws in the demonic principle, thereby emphasizing that this boundary is no static demarcation. "Dogs eat/gravel," he states laconically, and the picture of the piercing fangs makes any single instant momentous. Gravelly Hill marks the beginning of Dogtown, and so the poem seeks to reveal earth as the active, the responsive material which will engage naturally in a man's prehensions. Thus the gravel itself is no mere attribute but an evidence of the activity of physis:

... the Lower
Road gravelly, how the hill was, not the modern useableness
of any thing but leaving it as an adverb as though the Earth herself
was active, she had her own characteristics... (MII, p.160)

This highly idiosyncratic condition brings Olson to a visual mythic image prominent in Jane Harrison's Themis. The early Greeks depicted their

culture heroes as literally autochthonous; Erechthonius, for example, the second great hero of Athens, is portrayed as actually emerging from the ground of the city. . On the particular terracotta which Jane Harrison includes,¹¹ and to which "Gravelly Hill" refers, Gaia rises in human form from the earth; she is an opulent woman with long, streaming hair, and holds aloft the child Erechthonius to be entrusted to the care of his waiting foster-mother, Athena. For Olson, it is a vision urging the "tender care" and completion by man of the living and malleable configurations making up our landscape. Gravelly Hill is itself like the child Erechthonius, unique, perfectly formed, and demanding the nurture which only an affective relation can provide. Active earth and responsive man are the two halves of physis, and their mutual engagement determines the very boundaries of the imago mundi:

... as though the Earth herself
was active, she had her own characteristics, she could
stick her head up out of the earth at a spot
and say, to Athena I'm stuck here, all I can show
is my head but please, do something about
this person I am putting up out of the ground into your hands

And what "this person" of Gravelly Hill excites is a natural instinct in man, his "greed" or appetite for a wholeness of structure. By the very fact of organism, we transmute the disturbingly particular conditions in which we find ourselves. Olson harks back to the archaic vision, when earth was properly regarded as paradisal; she was "tenement" and "messuage," a dwelling-place, an orb to be held and cherished. But such reverence is viable now more than ever, according to Olson, and he brings us sharply against the inescapable intimacy of man with his world; the April air moistens the body's inner membrane:

As it is there isn't a single thing isn't an opportunity
for some 'alert' person, including practically everybody
by the 'greed,' that they are 'alive,' therefore. Etc.
That, in fact, there are 'conditions!' Gravelly Hill

11. See Themis, p.264.

or any sort of situation for improvement, when
 the Earth was properly regarded as a 'garden
 tenement message orchard and if this is nostalgia
 let you take a breath of April showers
 let's us reason how is the dampness in your
 nasal passage... (MII, p.160)

Any place, therefore, provides the opportunity for creation. This
 is the driving optimism which sustains Olson's faith in the universal
 realization of mythic process. His own immediate condition is the
 totality of Gravelly Hill. This is sufficient, and from the root of the
 hill outward a world is made. This mound of Dogtown is thus identical
 with Ptah, the Risen Land, "the Memphite lord of/all Creation" (MII, p.160).
 And Olson can therefore speak in the person of Gravelly Hill, affirming
 that its physiographical profile is congruent with the boundaries of the
 "mighty world." The hill's edges touch on the edges of creation,
 provided human appetite engages in this naturally mythic topology:

... Gravelly Hill says
 leave me be, I am contingent, the end of the world
 is the borders
 of my being (MII, p.161)

"To leave the hill be" is, in fact, to bring it to the fruition of its
 innate condition, so that its very being defines earth's sources and ends.

Olson next conducts a topographical tour of the hill, inclusive of
 historical incident. It is an intensely personal exploration on the
 poet's part, and he stops just where a big rock ends Gravelly Hill's
 "being." At the rear of William Smallman's house is initiated the
 "Hellmouth;" Tartarós lies just beyond the limiting slope:

of nothing but black granite turned
 every piece,
 downward,
 to darkness,
 to chill
 and darkness. From which the height above it even
 in such a fearful congerly
 with a dominant rock like a small mountain

above the Hellmouth the back of Smallmans is
 that this source and end of the way from the town into
 the woods is only - as I am the beginning, and Gaia's
 child - katavóthra. Here you enter
 darkness... (MII, p.162)

So in the immediacy of creation, the present condition is sufficient unto
 the limits of the world. It is particle and wave. But, of course, the
 darkness of Tartarós contained in the possibilities of space-time,
 encroaches upon the utmost verges of the moment. Whitehead describes the
 instant as a transition between two worlds:

Each moment of experience confesses itself to be a transition
 between two worlds, the immediate past and the immediate future...
 In the present there are no individual occasions belonging to the
 future. The present contains the utmost verge of such realized
 individuality. 12

Gravelly Hill, caught up in Olson's investment of energy, marks the very
 extremity of creation. Boundaries are therefore contingent on immediacy
 of condition, and lurking at the edges are the ingressions of the new:

It is Hell's mouth
 where Dogtown ends
 (on the lower
 of the two roads into
 the woods.
 I am the beginning
 on this side
 nearest the town
 and it - this paved hole in the earth
 is the end (boundary
 Disappear (MII, p.162).

But the limits of creation must include a man's own, and in one of
 his last written essays Olson probed the extent of his own statement that
 "limits/are what any of us/are inside of" (MI, p.17), Entitled "The
 Animate Versus the Mechanical, and Thought," it is in many ways as
 abstruse as the earlier "Proprioception," and its apparent difficulties
 obscure an equally basic message. The starting point is gravitation,
 but both the Newtonian and Einsteinian theories are passed over in

favour of the phenomenological. It is a human universe which Olson inhabits, and so his experience of gravitation must be humanly comprehended. He cites first the geotropism of plants which is obviously a disposition originating in their organic make-up; a plant "has at the tips of its leaves and the ends of its roots 'standing - growing - responding' actions" (AP, p.74). The connection with our skin cells' lightning receptivity is silently implied.

The simplicity which underlies this essay is that we too are geotropic; by the very fact that we live and are animate, we are necessarily limited to some condition of the earth's surface at every second. It is Olson's habitual theme in the light of a newly realized extremity. Merleau-Ponty believes that "the human body with its habits which weave round it a human environment, has running through it a movement toward the world itself..."¹³ We are thus physically, and perhaps physiologically, drawn to the earth on which we stand. Gravitation becomes for Olson, "the great unadmitted limit" (AP, p.74), and without this limit, he surmises, thought becomes "over-extent," the humanist sprawl. Thus "thought, consciousness and sense perception... are secondary phenomena" (AP, p.75), all originating from the "aboriginal instance of ... creativity," geotropism. Like many of Olson's insights, it seems almost too obvious to be stated, but it is through bypassing the obvious, he maintains, that we have stultified the cosmic urge to self-creation.

Once we admit the aboriginal limit, the immediacy of condition becomes paramount. The primordial is seen to be consequent. As Olson puts it: "... there is no 'knowledge' of ... anything, including the 'Universe' or the 'Self,' except by this 'Time' phenomenon of freshness

13. Phenomenology of Perception, p.326.

..." (AP, p.74). The essay is anti-Einstein in that it also tends to split up the time-space continuum, by making time a concept intimately tied to a man's creativity. Space, then, is confined within the primordial instant, and time is described as a "multiple or power" (AP, p.76). As indeed it is in Olson's poetics, where a single perception can carry you to the boundaries of the cosmos. Newton's law of gravitation states that the force of attraction between two objects is directly proportional to the inverse square of their distance; Olson's law of human gravitation states that there is "distance by the inverse square of the event" (AP, p.74). The intensity with which we take up the perceptual event will determine the distance we are transported. He believed that by such "an inverse square," one could reach the heavens, or at least, the heaven of self-hood.

It is for this reason that the essay refers to the Greek muses of astronomy and history, Urania and Clio. Einstein's and Newton's theories of gravitation were based upon, and experimentally substantiated by, planetary motion, and Olson similarly sees human gravitation as inclusive of the heavens. A man's historically productive act, the "Clio," "'carries' throughout the system - the system being 'Creation'..." (AP, p.74). The Flower of Gloucester is Olson's heaven and thus his perceptual acts transmit effects which are as real and as measurable as those of mechanical gravitation. The essay's attempts to parallel the mechanical with the human experience are sometimes tenuous, but the essential point is easily ascertained, if not so easily applied. The "great unadmitted limit" is what allows us to make a cosmos:

...man as separateness (animal) disposes of himself by sitio-chooses his place but which even though it gives him freedom disposes him likewise by gravity... equally tropistically. Heaven and Earth (AP, p.76).

"Neither God, nor the World, reaches static completion," according to Whitehead. "Both are in the grip of the ultimate metaphysical ground, the creative advance into novelty."¹⁵ Olson engaged Tartarós and Typhon in order to illustrate this "ultimate metaphysical ground," and pacing the boundaries of his own self-creation, he sought to show man the possibilities hidden within impassable limits. Any instant "is its own interpretation..." (AP, p.39), and the next may utterly rework the matter of creation:

to forecast a tied
ellipse in which a story
is told and the ends of the string are
laid over and stand

as though the air
began again another
story by another man (MIII, p.210)

15. Process and Reality, p.411.

Chapter Eight

Postscript: The Testing of the Vision

It is the complementarity image which in many ways best wraps in the substance of Charles Olson's "human universe." That the electron manifests itself as both particle and wave is a paradox which science has had to accept. While Faraday's electromagnetic field and the "General Theory of Relativity" brought to light the fluidity which is matter and space, Planck's discovery of the quantum of action made the principle of self-containment of equal importance in the characterization of physis. There is, therefore, a dualism intrinsic to the consistency of matter. Hermann Weyl's first version of Philosophy of Mathematics and Natural Science, completed in 1926, concentrated very largely on the fluid or wave aspect of phenomena; to the edition of 1949, however, which Olson read, he appended several chapters, all of which touch on the scientific revelations of those intervening years. And it is the increasing substantiation of a co-existent idiosyncratic principle which Weyl saw as virtually defying the capabilities of language. Neither German nor English, he suggests, has words expressive of such paradox:

Physical phenomena are spread out in the continuous extensive medium of space and time; it was this aspect which dominated to a considerable degree the epistemological thought about natural science that the main part of this book tried to collect in 1926. This was historically justified, and the accomplishments of general relativity, still very fresh at that time, lent additional emphasis to this point of view. In the last two decades, however, discontinuous and combinatorial structures underlying the natural phenomena have become of increasing significance. Here a deeper layer seems to come to light, for the description of which our ordinary language is woefully inadequate... the philosophical penetration remains largely a task for the future (p.275).

Each of Olson's methodologies does, in fact, incorporate this most essential dualism. To take first the theory with which he is most readily associated, we see that "projective verse" evolves from the particle - wave formula. The two halves are clearly specified in the essay itself:

Let me put it baldly. The two halves are:
 the HEAD, by way of the EAR, to the SYLLABLE
 the HEART, by way of the BREATH, to the LINE

And the joker? that it is in the 1st half of the proposition that, in composing, one lets-it-rip; and that it is in the 2nd half, surprise, it is the LINE that's the baby that gets, as the poem is getting made, the attention, the control, that it is right here, in the line, that the shaping takes place, each moment of the going (HU, p.55).

The wave of syllabic connection is inexorable; the poet simply allows it to generate from the root sound. But it is his own breath which is particularity, the self-contained resistance which equally contributes to poetic process. In a footnote to his translation of The Secret of the Golden Flower, Richard Wilhelm notes that the Chinese character for "breath" is made up of the character tzu 'of,' 'self,' and the character hsin 'heart' or 'consciousness' (p.40). And it was, of course, the specificity of breath which Olson encouraged each poet to exploit for himself. The very tracheal modulations will determine the weight of a vowel and therefore influence the wave of coinhering syllables. It is this rooting of poetry in personal breath which unites authors as distinct as Olson, Robert Creeley, and Robert Duncan, a quality perhaps not fully realized until one listens to tape-recordings of the poets reading their own works. Such one-to-one correspondences between poet and audience Olson also encouraged, the Reading at Berkeley being a gruelling induction to the politics of direct confrontation. In this protracted and faltering oration, Olson's fervour for "a new humanism" is unmistakable. And inextricable from the honesty of presentation are

the laboured articulations of his breath, testifying to semi-drunkenness, over-indulgence in cigarettes, and general ill-health. Yet he neither apologizes nor attempts to control what is for him, a most natural mode of speech. The Berkeley reading is admittedly tortuous, but it is an instance of form as an extension of content. The process of self-discovery and the attempted illumination of a life's conviction is no smooth process, and the stumblings and quantum leaps serve to underline the very methodology he propagates.

Implicit in the text of "Projective Verse" therefore, is the interaction of two organisms, the poet's and the reader's; in order to realize the full implications of a projective poem, the breath of the poet should register on the ear. It is possible that through growing familiarity with typographical spacing and syllabic generation, we will more easily learn to read the poem as would the poet himself. We have, for example, Robert Duncan's testimony that he was unable to appreciate Robert Creeley's short stories until he was made familiar with Creeley's personal breath-groupings (See Chapter IV). It is a peculiarity of "projective verse," that once heard, the voice of the poet will naturally be recalled in the silent reading of his poems. Olson's whole philosophy centres on the most delicate honing of points of contact. The poet's breath and the reader's ear he regarded as one of the most potentially productive of such conjunctions.

Within the methodology of mythic process as it is elaborated by Olson, the wave-particle formula also obtains. The Jungian collective unconscious is an unremitting flux in the life of man, the leftward swirling Okeanos as pervasive as the electromagnetic fields permeating creation:

... There is a vast

internal life, a sea or organism
full of sounds & memoried
objects swimming or sunk
in the great fall of it as,
when one further
ring of the 9 bounding
Earth and Heaven runs
into the daughter of God's
particular place, cave, palace... (MIII, p.182)

But it is a "particular place" or "cave" into which Ocean rushes, the destination in "self" which is the crux of the essay "Proprioception."

Indeed, the essay "Human Universe" (1950), contains the same seminal structure which Olson was to refine and demonstrate over the nineteen years in which his poetic career consisted. Amounting to a slash at conventional humanism, this essay advances rather the idea of man's emplacement in creation. Because of her geographical extent and original fecundity of resource, America's despoilment is still more dramatically apparent than that of Europe. "Human Universe" sought to rectify the attitudes of sprawl and easy appropriation which characterized the unthinking disposition to physis. The essay's central image, man's skin as contingent to phenomenal energies, again draws in the idiosyncratic principle. Man is resistance, or resistor, to the waves of energy which are physis. And in order to implement his own half of the equation, he must sustain the flow of energy. The circuit is completed only with his productive act, whether manual, mental, or embodied in language.

The essay "Equal, That Is, to the Real Itself" established the image as both wave and particle. The "physicality" of an object (in Maximus volume III the star-nosed mole and the leaping salmon are important instances) can take us to the edges of the cosmos, just as does the contingent landscape of Gravelly Hill. Olson clarifies what

William Carlos Williams' "no ideas but in things"¹ leaves unclear. It is not merely that ideas are expressible through things, but that they originate in things, and only there. Thus perceptual attention continued a pre-eminent task for Olson. Instancy transmitted him to the sources and ends of earth:

Watch-house
 Point: to descry
 anew: attendeo
 & broadcast
 the world (over the
marshes to the outer limits even where minutiae
 hold & swim in the electro-magnetic
 strain... (MIII, p.25)

All the propaganda of the early 1950's for the primacy of the instant, resolves itself in a single equivalence included in volume III. The worth of what we glean and produce is dependent on our speed of receptivity; the transformation of Dogtown to imago mundi hinges on as basic a thing as the rate of perception:

valorem is

rate: the

Dogtown - the
 rune of the
 Nation (MIII, p.129)

Out of the dogmatic conditions of his proximate Dogtown, Olson made the conceptual decisions and mythic images he believed every man capable of. The essay "Proprioception" had made that capability physiologically inherent. Not that man would come "naturally" to the image-making process; he must definitively school himself. But the propensity or

1. W.C. Williams, Paterson (New York: New Directions, 1963), p.14.

instinctual base, according to Olson, was a primary constituent of human function. Special View had defined "function" as the "natural proper or characteristic action of anything" (p.18), and man's ultimate function must be the reverent assimilation of his world.

Despoilment, sprawl, and the abstract slide are all cause for despair, but the aim of a "causal" mythology is to produce a world-picture compelling man's respect for physis. Heaven is immanent in the matter of creation if we but draw it out. The Berkeley reading is in part a frenetic condensation of the message contained in The Special View of History: any of a man's acts are "historic, in other words, produce..." (SV, p.16); that is, any single act can be read in terms of the wave-particle structure. As with the image of man as both centre and circumference, we are made to realize that anything we do has effects which "carry throughout the system" (AP, p.74). One of the problems in discussing Olson's philosophy is that the basic tenets seem too obvious to be worth articulation. Underlying each of his propositions, however, is humilitas, the essential shift displacing man from the manipulative centre. Given our real emplacement, Olson nevertheless affirms the potency of human action. We are, as "Human Universe" points out, the only organism which actually destroys energy (See HU, p.12). To make us conscious of as straightforward a thing as our habitual wastage of resource, is a beginning. But Olson sought moreover, to restore a world in holes with its original archaic splendour. Gravelly Hill was largely untrammelled and served him as a root picture, an ideogram which bound in the potential beauty of the earth. And he urged each intelligent man to make himself such a picture, an orb which is both an icon and a sacred trust. The ramifications of holding the world as an intimate and beloved possession are inevitably ethical.

The substance of Olson's work is itself a unified organism. It is impossible to isolate any single aspect. The world-picture, finding out for oneself, the clean perceptual attention, the sounds and roots of language, are all subsumed by a "human universe," man in-bound to physis, and there, fostering her potential which is, he discovers, his own. In his poetry and prose Olson continued to encourage the perfect conjunction of points of contact as against the slide. This is Pound's claritas taken to new and far wider extremes. It is not only words of whose roots we are careless, but physis in its entirety: the roots of the world, and the roots of our own organism.

The uniqueness of individuals Olson was to celebrate as he did the particularity of non-living objects. Breath, the eye, personal selection from the phenomenal field, and chance placement in the continuum make each human act of singular origination. It is a law of the particle well known to contemporary science. Wolfgang Pauli, an Austrian physicist who worked on certain projects with Werner Heisenberg, developed what is known as "the exclusion principle;" this states simply that no two electrons are ever found in the same complete state (See Weyl, p.247). The human act, on the macrocosmic scale is equally such an intensely private production. Physis suffuses, but the body she enters is single. In his Tribunals, Robert Duncan centres on the idiosyncrasy of authorship in breath, significantly drawing on Olson's own archetypal monoliths, the "isolate satyrs:"

the isolated satyr each man is,
severd distinct thing, taking his word
his mouth, his own, there, at the gate
or door the sound forces in the mind
from the heart-spring. I saw

willingly the strain of my heart break
and pour its blood thundering at the life-locks ²

2. Duncan, Tribunals (San Francisco: Black Sparrow Press, 1970), n.pag.

It is Olson's aim to point a way toward a methodology. In volume II of the Maximus he had given a demonstration of but one man's way to mythic transmutation. "Projective Verse" and The Special View of History similarly consist of suggestions which yield to personalization. The final two lines of the first "Maximus" epistle characterize the whole of his work: "than that which you/can do!" (MI, p.4).

In the third and final volume of Maximus, Olson curves back upon himself. The primary methodologies have been explained, and alone in Gloucester, he demonstrates the essence of the disposition he had so long publicized. Gloucester and most particularly, Dogtown, define the limits of his world, physis in her outward aspect. And Charles Olson is the determined particle, stripped of all social cushioning, circumstances having deprived him of family, and increasing prestige alleviating the quotidian struggle for economic survival. His wife Elizabeth had died in the spring of 1964; he saw the daughter of his first marriage but rarely, and his young son lived elsewhere. The poems of his last two years, 1968 and 1969, are particularly marked by loneliness, but where the imago mundi is successfully made, the image of woman, his wife as sustaining anima, is never far away. He had, therefore, opportunity to concentrate his energies on the landscape he had selected as the matter of creation; he was able to put to the test repeatedly his conviction that Dogtown Common would yield the cosmos. Although his personal situation reduced the engagement with physis to its most pristine form, the actual mythic process became increasingly difficult. Gloucester was by 1965 succumbing to the malaise of American society as a whole, violence and mutual suspicion becoming rapidly commonplace. Police-cars appear in the third volume seemingly as an index of Gloucester's degeneration. The fabric was shredding, and this factor compounded

with the pain of isolation, eat at the intensity of his will:

Now date August 1965 returning

Gloucester from as far out in the world as my own
wages draw me, and bitter
police cars turn my corner, no one in the world
close to me, alone in my home where a plantation
had been a Sunday earlier than this been
proposed ...

.....
... once more drawn into the
plague of my own unsatisfying possible identity as
denominable Charles Olson ... (MIII, p.80)

But his task is the making of the world, and the pieces must be
resewn instant by instant. A poem written three months following the
above, is structured in a vertical certainty. Despite his distance
from his own child, he resolves to perfect the methodology. The
maintenance of the "shining monstrance" (AM, p.25) is dependent on the
will of man, and not on some fortuitous blessing:

Tall in the Fort,
my son and I,
the fortune said. My son

leagues off, and I
high here on the little hill, all the world

close, and far away, fortune but
Fixed Will, Foreknowledge Absolute, the

wings of chance
filthy dew, and nothing given,

all that one cares for
proven

and come true (MIII, p.102)

Four years later and approximately one year before his death, he packs into a single poem all his appetitions. Physical hunger pangs, the desolation of a Gloucester winter, and the absence of human company serve to sharpen the urge that the translation of energies be immaculate. Locked alone amidst Gloucester snow, demand is still stronger than despondency:

continuous 4 blizzards of February March 5 feet
 of snow all over Cape Ann /starving
 and my throat tight from madness of isolation &
 inactivity, rested hungry empty mind all
 gone away into the snow into the loneliness,
 bitterness, resolvedness, even this big moon
 doesn't warm me up, heat me up, is snow
 itself /after this snow not a jot of food left
 in this silly benighted house all night long sleep
 all day, when activity, & food, And persons/
 5:30 AM hungry for every thing (MIII, p.206)

The third volume might well be dedicated to Typhon. It registers in all honesty the fluctuations which are in the nature of the vision. Momentary despair results in a subsequent hardening of the will. Perhaps the volume's ultimate condemnation of Gloucester is that she "is now indistinguishable from/the USA" (MIII, p.204), and even this infection he struggles to cleanse with mythic waters. Against a Gloucester which he perceives as "now a mangled/mess of all parts swollen/ & fallen/into/degradation..." (MIII, p.202), he opposes typos and the creative will: "the Blow is Creation" (MIII, p.226) is certain affirmation of productive possibility. Two companion poems written on the same day in June of 1966, evidence the continued surety of his own self-demand. He juxtaposes the unseeing gaze of his "Neolithic/ neighbours" with his deeply sensual celebration of a poppy's buds and petals. These human beings, geographically proximate to him in his beloved Gloucester, have never implemented the eye's vector force. But implicit in his criticism is the antidote for sprawl, and his own

complementary poem manifests a full responsiveness to typos. When his lounging neighbours intrude on and destroy his world, he builds it again using a flower as base:

Contemplating my Neolithic
neighbours, Mother and Son, while Son mows
noisily, with power mower the grass & Ma
hangs over the fence simply
watching - and Maiden, or Unmarried Sister
comes around the corner to see him,
too
& if you let the ape-side out the eyes
have died or become so evolutionary
and not cosmological (vertical
not the eyes any longer of the distinctness
of species but of their connections
And then Nature is a pig-pen or
swill... (MIII, p.166)

... And what I found was dark buds
like cigars, and standing up and my question is
when, then, will those blossoms more lotuses to the
West than lotuses wave like paper and petal by petal
seem more powerful than any thing except the Universe
itself, they are so animate-inanimate and dry-beauty...(MIII,p.167)

Consistent with process and Typhon's resurgences, the inbindings of universe and self are intermittent and fleeting. Maximus volume III is a string of such beads, orbs made and re-made. The "salmon" poem is one such. The leap of the fish and the concomitant intake of breath are signs of instantaneous ecstasy. But the salmon cannot remain poised at apogee, and the physical body struck in wonderment must breathe again. The gleaming fish at the highest point of an arc perfectly embodies the split-second splendour of creation:

the salmon of
wisdom when,
ecstatically, one
leaps into the Beloved's
love. And feels the air
enter into
strike into one's previously breathing
system (MIII, p.187)

It should be noted that Olson did not conceive woman as naturally capable of such consciously idiosyncratic creation. This, at least, would appear to be his conceptual decision about the human female. In both his poetry and prose, woman seems to express herself in a wave rather than a particle function. She is either the soothing and sustaining anima figure or the waters of the unconscious itself. To "... woman most/who knows most..." he had declaimed in "As the Dead Prey Upon Us" (AM, p.171), but female knowledge he sees as totally lacking in self-consciousness. Woman is part of unreflecting physis; she need not create an imago mundi since she is, in fact, its natural embodiment. Heterosexual love and the cosmic vision are inextricable for Olson, and in both acts the woman gives more than she is aware:

To have the bright body of sex and love
back in the world - the moon
has her legs up,
in the sky of Egypt (MIII, p.52)

Indeed, there are poems in which he specifies woman's "proper or characteristic action" as the bodily and spiritual nourishing of man. Like Nut the Egyptian sky goddess, woman is to make her breasts available, so that the milk of love and myth may suffuse a man's creation:

So let the woman known as Baby Doll
come on, who stands before you with a single story,
and good enough it is to tell, that here's the body
of a woman thrown from birth alone to entertain
the boys, the freshness of those things,
growing out of the side of her like mountains,
twin-breasted mountains, and showing them off,
as though they'd shoot berry juices,
or a man could get caught in them and lose
his life... 3

But it is in a poem written in his last year that he is most explicit about the disparity of function between male and female.

Woman sleeps blissfully in the amniotic fluid of the world's womb,
herself an unconscious vessel of spirit:

... He goes down
into the underworld
each night as the Mother
like a sweet woman turns
in her sleep. Isis
doesn't need to revisit
the Dead. Man does, men only
live high, - and far down (Where
the Father (MIII, pp.215-16)

Isis, the primary Great Mother figure of the Egyptians and bearer of the spirit-child Horus, need not visit the dead for inspiration and image, for she is herself the container of these things. The conscious delving and fabrication is thus a male preserve. Man "lives high" and "down," while woman floats in a passive omniscience.

Woman's function as Olson conceived it, is subsumed by volume III's final poem, an ideogrammic summation of the poet's life. According to the editors of this volume, Olson specified which were to be the first and last poems in the book (See MIII, p.5). The last poem consists of four units, each a noun:

my wife my car my color and myself (MIII, p.229)

The culminating "myself" is the achievement of the individuation process, when world and psyche rejoice in their own integrity. That he begins with "wife" indicates that she is an element before all things: the uroboros which is ultimately the anima, physis in her outward aspect,

and the real woman who is love. The "car" is most probably a continued satiric reference to his own body, as with the "White Cadillac" of volume II; there can be no imago mundi without the prior physiological instrumentation. "Color" binds in the influence of society in Olson's existence; as he noted in the Berkeley reading, a white man in America falls heir to a radically different "given" than any of his fellow black poets,⁴ and it was a constituent which Olson could not omit from his own poetic epitaph. And his wife Elizabeth must be at the forefront of his life's process as he spelled it out in the barest possible imagery.

But regardless of what he thought woman's capability, Olson's objective was to impart to "mankind" the far ramifications of any human act. A primary motive of his work was the urge to see man restored to his natural condition of delimited organism, fed by a greater, and ultimately mysterious source. The incident involving the star-nosed mole which he relates in the poem "West Gloucester" (MIII, pp.26-27), in many ways reflects the predicament of Western man as Olson envisions it. The mole had somehow become displaced from its natural setting of yielding soil and vegetation, and the poet finds it vainly pushing its nose into the impermeable pavement of the highway. He removes it "like a pea on a knife to/the side of the road," with one of the oars he carries in his station wagon. This rescue might stand as image of his major poetic objective: the delivery of man from the debilitating "furniture" of the mind, the impenetrable dermal casing, the glazed eye, and the sprawl of self-love. He returns the mole to the soft marshes of Walker's Creek, and for any man who would listen, he similarly pointed the way to an ambience both proper and productive. "West Gloucester" is a poem in which Olson's "tender care" for the

organism is movingly apparent:

... its dance dizzy dance
on its own nose out of its head
working as though it would get rid of
its own pink appendage

like a flower dizzy
with its own self

like the prettiest thing in the world drilling
itself into the

pavement

and I gave it, I hope, all the marshes of Walker's Creek
to get it off what might also seem
what was wrong with it, that the highway
had magnetized the poor thing
the loveliest animal I believe I ever did see
In such a quandary (MIII, pp.26-27)

The extent of Olson's literary contribution is yet to be determined, but taking the root of the word poet, the Greek poiein to make, it cannot be denied that he did make a world in Gloucester which has inspired some men, amongst them his peers. Particularly with The Special View of History and Causal Mythology, he defined poetic creation as a necessarily quotidian activity. He built on particularity, the single points or acts which determine the very character of our world, and the dissemination of his philosophy will probably continue to be such a gradual, and humanly one-to-one process. His writing cannot be divorced from its practicability; the combined methodologies have an almost inconceivable scope, how to live, and how to relate to one's environment. He gives us a world emergent from physis, simultaneously mapping out the way:

Sunday

night June 19th with some hope my own daughter
as well as 3 year old Ella may

live in a world on an Earth like this one we
few American poets have

carved out of Nature and of God (MIII, pp.173-74)

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